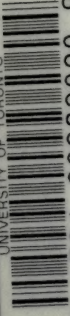
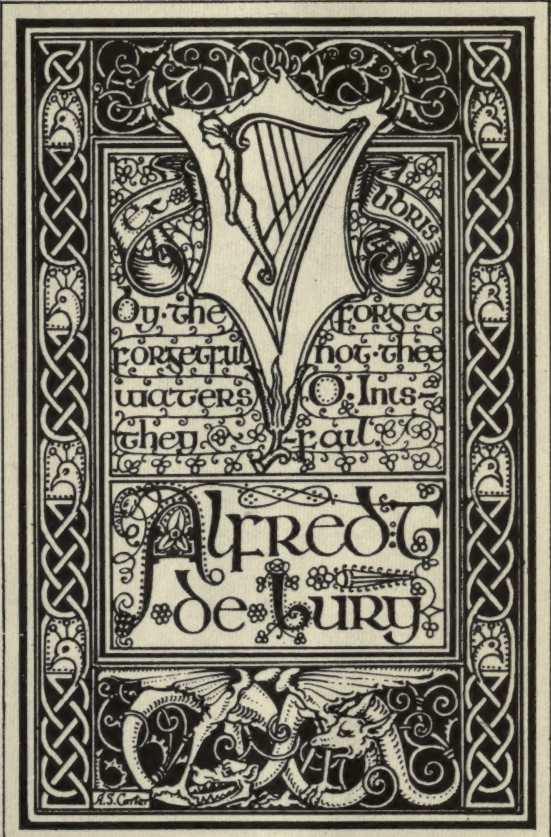


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Oy the forgetful waters then

forget not thee O Inis-rail

Alfred de Lury

A.S. Carr





BY THE SAME AUTHOR

POETRY

A VISION OF LIFE (1909)
THE CHILDREN OF TIME (1911)
THE MOUNT OF TRUTH (1913)

CHILDREN OF EARTH

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CHILDREN OF EARTH



BY

DARRELL FIGGIS

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DUBLIN AND LONDON
MAUNSEL AND COMPANY, LTD.

1918

CHILDREN OF EARTH



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CHILDREN OF EARTH

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

EARTH, who moulds and builds the destinies of those who lean on her bosom, stretched her powers to the utmost. Maolan lies set in the Atlantic; and, loosed from that desert of waters, the winds fell upon it in a fury of rage. Fury it was, not play; or, if play, then a play like the onset of heroes. The torn and tangled rocks lying along the margin of the coast were jagged with the memory of many such issues; and now the waves that thundered upon them were shivered with spray that, caught by the howling wind, was borne like a flung mane far inland, racing in froth and spume over the bogs where the noise of the impact could not penetrate, to be caught finally on bowed bog-grass or wailing heather in memory of the god whose salt spittle it was. The headland of Gob Gé, where the bog was of the finest black, was covered with the spume as though it had snowed. A few curlew and sea-pie momentarily ventured to fly along beneath sheltering banks in search of better cover; to be twisted away down the bog, if by any chance the wind caught them, until they could recover their balance and sweep to earth again. Save for such surreptitious signs, there was no hint of life to be seen anywhere. Earth rose dominant over the Life she had bred and, in hardihood, nurtured; she quelled Life by the riot of her play-mood; and her revelry was wild with the strange madness of battle.

Over the waste of waters the grey ruining clouds had for a moment broken to display a saffron and stormy sunset. The foamy heads of the waves, as in tossing mountains they rushed forward to meet the challenge of the rocks, became touched with a dull glow while the saffron-edged bars of clouds revealed the horizon just below them. Numberless tossing and rushing heads appeared, reflecting the angry clouds burning at the far end of the avenue of sudden colour

thus created. The rifts then were healed; grey clouds swept over the saffron bars; and, as the streamers of rain trailed past shrieking in the bog-pools, dusk slowly ripened to the darkness of night.

With night fury became frenzied. The waves pounding on the strand from Gob Gé round the bay to Bailawnach, seemed as though, keen to have found a place with no guard of rock, they would break through into the land itself. They rushed hissing upon the cottages lying near the strand; whereupon a wild excursion of humanity, goods and cattle, to take refuge among the cabins in securer places. The incoming tide was not so much of waters as of monsters that rose with flying manes of foam and rushed crying up the sand, falling over each other in their haste to reach to higher levels. Further along the strand large smooth rocks were flung like missiles towards the village. Many such a night of revel had formed the bay, in cycles of Time that made mock of the little hours of those who clustered in the cabins beyond; and it seemed now almost as though the final onset of forces was about to be arrayed.

If it was a night of terror to her brood of men, huddled in their thatched cottages that threatened always to prove insufficient, it was a night of revelry for Earth herself. She in whose setting their little affairs were rehearsed, who bent and shaped them and their doings, dismissed them now and took uninterrupted possession of her spaces. She stretched her powers. She made merry. The winds that had lashed lazy waters into raging demons fell with a cry upon the great huddled heap of Cruach Mór and swept round the company of the hills in boom on boom of sound. There seemed little other than these recurrent booms of sound, as the winds, rising from fury to frenzy, rushed at the hills, tore at their sides, and swept round on their way. The mountains sweep in a slow circle from the spread mass of Cruach Mór to the sharp sides of Scráig Mór, and round the valley between them and the hills and heaths above Islean the wind roared as upon a mighty harp. A too attentive ear would have heard that the music was complete. Each mass brooding in the darkness gave back his different note to the winds visiting him. There was a depth and mass in the voice of Cruach Mór according well with his vast semblance. Glegeal took the winds coming from Cruach Mór on the one side, took the edge of a free south-west on another, and rang

back a sharper humming of sound in a more continuous note. Sliabh Ruad and Cnoc Dubh received the buffet freely, and sang back like two notes in a chord of sound, shriller amidst their tossing heather. And the steep sides of mighty Scráig Mór sang out a note, loud, clear, vibrant with a strange authority. The others were but the fillings-up of sound between Cruach Mór and Scráig Mór. Scráig Mór had a cry in his voice terrible to hear. Those that dwelt at his base stirred uneasily beside their little firesides as they heard him that night. Cruach Mór was deeper and fuller, an orchestra to himself, yet more comfortable—if comfort there might be in such a night.

So the booming of the wind sang about the concourse of the hills. Maolan narrows to a width of three or of two miles, running to the free ocean; and this company of giants runs south-westerly along the northern border for a backbone, Scráig Mór towering above the northern waters. Southward upon the southerly bay, lies the village of Coisabhaun. Behind Coisabhaun a great back of hills arise, running southwards in cliffs that took the fury of the loud south-west, protecting the little harbour behind them; but from Coisabhaun to the sheer cliffs from which Cruach Mór looks over upon the Atlantic there was no abatement in the night's frenzy. Each of the villages that ran along the southern coast, Coisabhaun, Islean, Barnaran and Bailawnach took the full buffet, received the whole terror of a night that drove their inhabitants huddled to their hearths. Before them raged the sea. Behind them the mountains cried aloud. Between these, in a darkness that baffled the brain as well as the eye, they lay crouched apart; and over and above and around them a terrific music arose. It was not for them to distinguish the differing constituents that filled up the mighty volume. The music was too full of terror for the voices to be heard that joined in that booming, roaring chorus. The noise of household strain and wreckage, even though it spoke catastrophe, was homelier than that terrifying play of the gods, that song and energy of the mighty ones of Earth.

There are no trees in Maolan. That could be distinguished even through the fixity of darkness. The country, could it have been seen, was gaunt and bare: hills, heaths and bogs broken by rocks or covered with tough grass and heather; and that quality came piercingly through the unknowledg-

able night. The buffet of the wind on rock-face had a bluntness of sound quite different from the long surging roar of the heather as it bowed beneath the scythes of air sweeping through them; and so again this was different from the shrill cry of the stiff bog grass that sang out suddenly and died away. The sodden moss was not without its stifled voice. Everything was vocal. The bosom of Earth herself—trembling now in the consciousness of unintermitted liberty—had its range of music. Firm ground and shivering bog each took voice. In the valleys and flat places, the sedgy hummocks, between which the bog had fallen away, caught the wind into their network, and made a strange complexity of sound impossible to distinguish. Runnels trickled into streams; and streams ran down the channels they had worn with an accumulating roar of sound. And over it all the swish and sting of the rain trailed over hill and valley, shrieking in the bog-pools and lashing the heather.

There was an infinity of music in the roaring that filled the night. The texture of sound was as complicated in its intimacies as it was terrifying in its vastness. It was both organ-like and organic. While the congregated sons of power sang each his note to the buffets of wind that tore at their sides, swept upon them, above them, and around them—so each blade of bog-grass, each blade of swaying heather, each bulk of sodden moss, each stream that rushed to the valley, each pool of bog-water, each hummock had its individual voice. It was yet the voice of open spaces. There was a surge and sway, a vast impetus of freedom, in that music to declare that neither bush nor tree in that inky darkness intercepted the course of the wind with an alien cry. The sound was all of movement. Nowhere did it rest in its movement. Freedom, distance, space and speed were the indissoluble constituents of that hymning of Earth, even when it was most complicated in its texture. Its very fury had a gesture of gauntness. Its very frenzy was severe and stern. Through a darkness that crushed the brain came the sense of wide space and unstaying speed.

So, above and below, the mightier sounds and the less were merged in a gesture of severity and distance. It was heard in the closer pattern of that music. It was without question when the living hills, animated and knowledgable now, were heard hymning in a music that needed no spiritual sympathy to discover. As they stood in their ranks of power,

theirs was the voice that gave sentience to the whole. It was no mere Aeolian music the wind broke from them. Bog-grass, heather and stream might have been smitten to that semblance, but from them came a music that was more also. It was more than merely their individuality of voice: expressed in that, it was yet further and deeper. Earth, in this night of mad frenzy, became vocal through them; and the terror of the mere force of wind was a lesser thing than this new terror that, above all the fury and stress, now found voice. It was most clearly to be heard in the song sung by Scráig Mór; but it was to be heard from Cruach Mór also, and, when the ear had become attuned to it, from his youngling Glegeal. It came not from the south-west, but, awakened by that, up from the deep bosom of Earth. Once heard, it transfigured all that terrifying music of the tempest. Deeper than it, possibly occasioning it, it was higher also, and enveloped it. Where one crushed life by an excess of strength, the other quelled life by its inconceivable terror, a terror born of inconceivable majesty. It emanated and pervaded. Amidst the mad frenzy that strewed the island with wreckage, it had a strange overwhelming stillness. Above the power of frenzied exertion it arose in its power of absolute being. Beyond and within the density of darkness it had a hint of shattering Light.

Thus the whole storm was merged in a new significance. The two powers became, in a strange sense of unity, parts of one another. The seas of lashing foam, the shrieking winds, the wailing heather and bog-grass, the hymning sons of power as they stood in their large curve of attentive knowledge, were all pervaded by the sense of something which they expressed but which was more than they. Through the cover of darkness the gesture of Earth was manifest. From within night, strewn with wreckage, came the throbbing rhythms from the heart of Earth herself. She revealed herself. Ever present, attuning and tempering her sons of men when they are least aware of her, or of her strong knowledge of them, she now rose up, and she revealed herself. Rather, she took her liberty. She revealed herself to herself; not to them. She, the protagonist in all their concerns, most surely then when they lean on her bosom and are attuned by her purposes—she stood in her spaces full of power. Huddled at their little hearths of fire, with a vague sense of unease greater than their more easily assign-

able fear, they crouched from her. Knowing her, or unknowing, they shrank from her, while she, Earth the beautiful, their Mother and their Protagonist, took the scene.

CHAPTER II.

THE village of Bailawnach lies clustered beneath the broad-based mass of Cruach Mór, in the depth of a little bay. It alone experienced the unbroken strength of the tempest, by wind and by sea. On the rising tide the inhabitants had already, in the depth of night, felt the sea too intimately. Those who had so roughly been turned from their homes had found shelter with relations or with friends in the cabins higher upon the land; and the event had created an opening theme of neighbourly conversation.

A little river empties itself on to the strand through the middle of the village, running through the heavy marsh and bog-land lying to the north; and the cottages cluster along its banks. The roadside between village and village is bare; the land on mountain-side and in valley is bare as it is gaunt; every village is so confined that a few feet only, in many cases, divides the walls of one cottage from another. A senseless and vindictive system of landlordry has from old time elected that this shall be so. It has elected that men may not build their cabins on the land they farm, but shall mass their households in a given and confined area. Hence in many parts Bailawnach presents as pitiful an appearance as its inhabitants may uniformly be found to have a quick sensitiveness for the decencies and dignities of life. And now, while the storm raged above the village, beyond even the fear of the wreckage it denoted, and the vague intangible fear, there burned a fierce resentment, a resentment that made a kindly people capable of any fierceness, against the tyranny that had caused many of their number to be unhoused on such a night.

“Ach, times are not so bad now as they were when I mind them. They are not now. You have the worst of them finished on you. That’s what I’m telling you.”

Tomas McLir sat on a bench in the corner of his cabin. A few had come in, for neighbourly news or for business con-

versation; and a fire, banked with turf, burned on his hearth. It was he who had spoken; and he leant forward to point his clay at the company in emphasis of his remarks. His humorous eyes, sharp with a touch of the satiric, the full close beard, grey now and stained about the mouth, the broad mouth and short nose, the crouched, intent shoulders, were all joined in a sudden short alertness.

“ ’Tis bad enough surely.” Seumas Clancy it was who spoke. He was a steady, quiet man of middle years.

“ Ach! ’Tis not then. ’Tis a decent enough time. Not but that I won’t say there are some troubles in it. But ’tis all the fortunes of war. ’Tis.”

Seumas smiled quietly as he looked with heavy, dreamy eyes upon the fire, like one who knew too well to be drawn into debate. His gentle, amused smile, and all that it meant, affected the small company, who sat quietly smoking and not speaking at all.

“ ’Tis. I mind the time well when for no more than standing on a rock and casting a line into the sea—ach, but ’tis no good talking!”

“ Ah!—” Seumas Clancy breathed in anticipation.

“ Let the landlord but catch you, and a day’s work, or two days’, was the price o’ it. It was. That’s what I mind. And it was little use enough complaining, for himself was the magistrate. The only magistrates were the damn landlords. Ach! It’s soft times enough now. The heat of the fight is gone. D’you mind that now.”

“ That’s a true word for you, Tom,” a woman spoke, who had been sitting talking to Cáit, Tom’s wife. In addition to her red petticoat, she had a red shawl over her head, which was now thrown back from her forehead. Hardly a grey hair showed in her head; though her face had the tanned many-lined skin that spoke her years. It was alert with vivacity, and her eyes shone with roguery. “ I mind the day myself—sorra word of a lie in it—when the little ass I had strayed near his house and brayed. Annoying his honour, it did, faith; and for that he reproved me. ‘ You let it grazing off your land,’ says he, ‘ and you’ll be charged for the rights.’ That’s what he said; because it brayed near his place. So says I—as God is above me it’s the truth I’m saying—so I up and says, gently and kindly I says to him, ‘ Well, your honour, the ass never strayed that far yet. Sure it must have gone to welcome you, and you after

returning from England.' That's what I said. And for that I had to work two days on his land."

"Ach!" was all that Tom said, as though in dismissal of the topic. And he settled to his pipe again.

The others began a desultory conversation among themselves.

"Is it right," asked Seumas Clancy in his quiet way, "that the master from beyond came back to-day?"

"James Burke, is it?" one asked.

"He did, then," another said. "It was on his bicycle he came."

"Poor creature, it's a wild journey he'll have going beyond again," Cáit said. She had sat with silent, erect dignity over by the window near the door. Her face was calm and strong; and she made a stiff impressive figure. Her touch of sympathy seemed curiously idiomatic of her.

"Wild enough surely. It's no night for any person to be walking the road."

"Ach, 'tis a bit of a wind only." Tom McLir turned to the company again. He spoke now in Irish, with more ease, and his strong use of gutterals when the younger men would have perhaps used breathings made his utterance more broken, while it helped the natural satire of his expression.

"There's no bravery at a person wouldn't laugh at a bit of wind."

"It is not," said his wife; "it's a wild night, God help him. He'll do well to rest in this place, and not seek to go beyond to Coisabhaum and the night the way this is."

"He's a decent, daring kind of man, with plenty of good looks on him," one of the men began, when the door was thrown open, and a great rush of wind filled the house, whirling on the wall the holy pictures hanging near the bed. The door slammed back against the dividing wall of the further small room; and a man was thrown into the room, dropping a gun in his confusion, and satisfying his sense of anger at his unceremonial handling with an oath. Thereupon he set to work, with weight and shoulder, to close the door against the wind.

Considering the unnatural character of his entry, it was taken with extraordinary calm by the company; one of whom laughed at him, while the others merely turned to look round at him for a moment, before they resumed their conversation. That fact alone indicated that the newcomer was

the son of the house. It was further assured by the way in which Tomas McLir at once turned to question him, sharply and briefly.

“Did you find the ram?”

Michael made no reply, but broke at once to a new subject.

“There’ll be a big trouble to-night at old O’Clery’s house.”

“How’s that now?” Seumas Clancy asked at once with quick interest.

“The thatch was coming off as I passed, and it’ll all be lifted off him in the night that’s on us.”

Michael was quiet and taciturn, viewing the whole matter manifestly as though it were a likely spectacle in which he had not the least interest. He was a tall, bulky man, with a rough-hewn face that was the contemptuous reflex of a hard, fierce disposition. Seumas Clancy, on the other hand, was clearly roused to an interest based on concern; a fact that declared itself in spite of the dignified and strict reserve in which each of the company seemed as though he or she were encased. There was a careful avoidance of superfluity in emotion or in speech. Tomas McLir, from his corner, looking on with critical eyes, gave the one alertness to the company; yet, in a manner, he seemed the best embodiment of the spirit informing the others.

“We had a right to be helping him so,” said Seumas.

“I had trouble enough coming this ways,” Michael replied; “and I’ll not go travelling again the night that’s in it. Maybe a man with that weight of pride on him should be able to tie his own thatch. Maybe he should. Hasn’t he got the decent Eoghan to help him?” And with that he lit his *duidin*. His unruffled manner made his contempt seem almost brutal.

Seumas Clancy looked steadily at the fire, and though the expression of his face altered in no degree the distinction between him and Michael McLir was suddenly clear. An alive sympathy glowed in him; a gentleness born from a different kind of strength. He said nothing; but another spoke.

“Eoghan’s a decent man altogether, so he is. He is wild surely; but there’s a great kindness attached to him, there is. And a great learning he has.”

“A great learning,” repeated Michael, and did not even

disturb himself as far as to put the sarcastic inflection into his voice.

With the same kindliness that had hitherto marked Seumas' manner he turned now and addressed Paddy O'Dochertaigh, the man who had spoken in favour of Eoghan O'Clery.

"Did you hear how Eoghan's business went with Nancy Flaherty?"

Michael rose at this, and, in a stolidity of contempt, went within the inner room. Paddy O'Dochertaigh, the meek deprecating man with an extraordinary delicacy of feature and as extraordinary a hint of obstinacy, had some diffidence in replying. The sudden attention everywhere made it evident that a theme of considerable interest had been struck.

"Maurya O'Flaherty's agin the match. She'll not flinch from her hostility any more than the old lad. She's like the height of a hill the way she stands agin it. 'Tis remarkable the way she rises the height of her when Eoghan fetches in the reach of her sight. He's the foolish man, however. A foolish kind of a man altogether. There's no cunning or craft attached to him when a body stands before him with an opposition of strength. That's the time he chooses to flinch in no degree, but to rise up moreover and demand a thing in the flaming way of him. 'Tis the very same trouble between him and his own father. Both are in the natural way of opposition. And 'tis as like a match as any in this place."

"Ach, it is not then," Tom McLir broke in from his corner. "Nancy'd be destroyed with a man not knowledgable to her. Eoghan's the way of an old flaming poet or likely hero. So he is. Nancy's only romancing. She'd be flittered living with him."

"Ah, so she would, Tom," Seumas said. "That's likely enough."

Paddy O'Dochertaigh, however, was not to be robbed of the picture of fitness he had framed for himself.

"It'd be a great match. She so beautiful as she is, with a softness in her way of speaking, and he rising up like the dawn of day that goes down the ways of the world without looking to right or to left. But what'll they do now, poor things, there's no saying at all, for his father and her mother have a power of opposition on them. And there isn't a cunning in them at all to find a way out of it,"

“When the old man marries the old woman ’tis then there’ll be a likely match in it,” Tom broke in with a catch of satirical laughter in his voice, and lit his pipe again with a live sod.

The laughter did not communicate itself to the company, that sat silent and grave, looking upon the fire. Its heat did not seem to distress them, though it made the cabin like an oven. Beside the fire, removed from the door, the rough four-posted bed stood. Beside the bed a large bench ran, in the corner of which Tomas McLir was ensconced. Opposite, beneath the window, stood the table, from beyond which, near the door, Cáit viewed the company with quiet dignity. The rest sat on chairs round the hearth. The further end of the cottage was separated by a partition the height of the wall; and the little room thus made had been shared by Michael and his brother Padraic until the latter went to America. The fact that the floor was of rough cement instead of the beaten earth proved that Tomas McLir owned the highest rank of cottage in the place. There are no ranks among the people. The ancient sense of community, supported by the ancient interlinking by the people by continual intermarriage, so strengthening and partly creating the sense of community, was too powerful for the consideration of artificial ranks. The very meanings of words were lost in that relation; for the strength of that emotion, democratic in its truest significance, had produced (or rather had maintained in its purity since before the dawn of history, despite the vicissitudes of centuries) a resolute sense of aristocracy, an aristocracy proud and reserved, almost fierce in its resentment if its existence were impeached or neglected, an aristocracy based not on a social cultus, but on a native instinct in mind and manners. Yet though there were no ranks of men other than the natural ranks of character and spiritual affinity, there were ranks of architecture. And these were, broadly, three: the cabins where the cattle were housed with the people, the cabins where the floor was the natural earth but from which the cattle were put forth to lodge in the attached outhouse, and the cabins where the floor was of cement. The chief note marking these last at night could be noticed now in Tomas McLir’s cottage.

The whiteness of the floor illuminated the house, so that, as the company sat in grave silence, they seemed scarcely in keeping with the light that prevailed. It was as though they

demanded a darker background; not only to mark their reserved dignity, but also to set off the crimson petticoats and brightly coloured shawls of the women. Both men and dress seemed, in their differing harmony, attuned to the stern aspect Earth had assumed: an aspect that demanded both dignity and the completing richness without which dignity is but a kind of negation. Earth had formed and framed this human kind; and the touch and hue of her bosom beneath seemed necessary to complete this portion of its company.

It seemed so because, as it sat in silence while the fury of the storm rocked the roof, it remembered the larger relation. Earth came within the walls of the cottage in the presence of her children who leaned on her bosom, and who now, in their silence, seemed, gravely and half uneasily, to remember her presence. She came even in her harsher, more brutal strength when Michael returned to the company from the room within. That he had heard all the conversation was manifest in his first words.

"I saw Nancy beyond going the road. Likely she's been talking with the decent Eoghan."

"Ah," said Paddy, "it's a wonder she wouldn't be. They do be all times meeting, and talking together in the dark places of the night."

"I didn't see them now the times I went on the road," said Seumas.

"'Tisn't in the ditches of the road they do go," Paddy explained, "but up on the heaths and hills, for Eoghan's a great man to be going up on the waste and rough places where a man would have to go lepping, and the sun in the height."

"He does now," said Michael; "I seen him that ways myself. He's not too bad in hard ways," he added in grudging praise.

"I've heard it to be told that he calls her by crying out in the way of the curlew that do be crying out with the dawn of day. So I've heard it to be told. And surely there should be a great need of craft and secrecies, for Maurya Flaherty does watch her all times, with her two eyes fixed on her like she would screw her to the house with them. She's a hard and severe woman, Maurya Flaherty is. 'Tis said she is all times trying to find a match for Nancy the way she wouldn't be flittered by her fancy for Eoghan; and

it's in my belief she would remark the likelihood of any man, if he were half the match of Eoghan himself. That's the kind of a hard woman she is. A hard and severe woman. And Nancy does be sometimes drooping like you'd see the flowers wither in unkindly uses in the bosoms of romancing women. Her softness is not capable to it. It is not."

Paddy, enamoured of his theme, did not notice that the company scarcely heeded him. They were uneasily conscious of the warring elements outside. He was half hypnotised by the dimly captured cadences of his speech; and, as he gazed earnestly forward, his face had a curious light of earnestness on it that transfigured the shifty expression it habitually wore. It transfigured it by revealing its cause. It displayed him as a man who avoided relations with his fellows, avoided them even at the charge of shiftiness, because of the vague querulous world he lived in, a world that was yet compounded of dreams. Only Seumas gave him heed, and that haltingly.

"Ah, she should be aware of it surely."

"Troth, it would be remarkable if they wouldn't find themselves in the way of making a runaway match. For he's like one of the poets of the olden time, and that's the manner of thing they would be doing now, so it is. And there's many a lad in this place whose heart would be hurt and broken and shivered itself seeing her ravished to some distant place so. So there would—sure it would be a grand match," he added a little lamely, as he felt he had drifted away from the others.

They were sitting in silence, uneasiness, apprehension even, marking each of them. Even the man who had sat silently beside Tomas McLir on the bench throughout the whole evening, with his shoulders pushed forward and his body averted as though in contempt—even he had now abandoned his detachment. He was a superb example of manhood, great of bone and feature, mightily rather than supply built, and with a face of such calm pride that, though it did not lack its degree of kindness, a silence born of habitual detachment seemed its resident expression. His earlier pose had seemed as inevitable as a well-expressed piece of statuary; but he had now uncrossed his legs and, with his hands on his knees, was gazing at door and window that seemed scarce able to bear the tumult without. He was Padraic McLir; and, in contrast to his earlier detach-

ment, he seemed now oddly to express the mood of the whole company. They were all restless; they each avoided the possibility of encountering another's glance.

There was occasion for apprehension. The wind did not come in one long steady pressure; it came in gusts that seemed to tear at the walls, to tug at window and at door, to pull and sway the cottage itself like some monstrous being without in a fury of resentment at such feeble barriers to his entry putting forward so dogged a resistance. There was life, there seemed thought and sentience, in the sudden attacks, in the abatements and fallings away, in the renewed loud crying of a tumult, the heave and pressure of which could be felt on roof, on door and on the window—whose slightness of area was its best security. There was the hint of a certain suppleness in the monstrous and raging strength that conveyed the idea of a depth of personality and psychology behind the tearing onsets. And now that the thought of all had turned to his clamouring and mighty presence, as though evoked by that, it raged more furiously than ever, as if its effort were to reach to those who feared the coming.

Except Padraic McLir none glanced at door or window, though these seemed perilously inadequate to withstand the recurring blasts. Their preoccupation seemed too general to find a place for its occasion. And when there came the noise as of a heavy body thrown up against the door, and a hand that fumbled with the latch, none turned to see what it was. It was only when the door was flung violently open, and two figures fell into the room (one holding the other lest he should fall), that the company started to its feet.

“Maise!” exclaimed Cáit McLir in alarm. “What’s this?”

“The roof’s blown off us, ma’am; and himself will be destroyed without a question if there’s not a decent bed and dry clothes to him.”

The speaker was a young man for all the red beard that now dripped with rain-water. He was tall and supply-built; in contrast to the grey old man he held in his arms.

“Michael O’Clery!” said Cáit wonderingly.

“Bring him to the fire, and you’re welcome,” said Tomas, coming forward quickly.

“I brought him some odd dry clothes,” Eoghan said, pulling out a parcel from beneath his coat and pitching them on the floor by the fire; “though ’tis true they’re not too dry at all.”

"Ach, not a word," Tomas exclaimed, taking hold of the old man who seemed dazed and stunned. "There's enough in this house itself will do for him."

"I'll step over, likely, Tom," said Seumas Clancy. "There's some of my clothes would do for him, if they're large itself."

"Ah, not at all! 'Tisn't tea he wants at all," he exclaimed to his wife who was already busying herself. "Bring me that sup from the bottle."

"The whiskey, is it?"

"It is."

While they busied themselves over the old man, Eoghan stood looking at him. The hair on both faces being wet, their identity of feature was remarkable. In the old man it was refined and delicate; in the younger man it was stronger and more rugged. The same straight nose, curving out slightly below the bridge, the same high cheek-bones, the same blue eyes, the same reach of forehead, the same resolute chin, and clear skin, even the same aspect of fierceness and pride, though in the old man this was now dulled and dead—all was the same, delicate in the old man, bold in the son, yet fiercely strong in both. Eoghan had been panting from his exertion; he had, in the demand for assistance and the answering hospitality, been surprised into excitement; but now, as he stood thus, he fell back into reserve.

"Did you carry him down?" Michael asked, as he stood beside him.

"He walked his part."

"You'll be jaded so."

This fact on such a night seemed to touch Michael into a friendliness based on his respect for physical endurance. But the effect on Eoghan was not encouraging.

"I'll go my own way now," he said, moving toward the door.

"You'll not go out this night?" Cáit asked in alarm.

"There's maybe something I can do to the house. And there's the cattle."

"Ah, leave it, man. 'Tis no night to be out. 'Tisn't. The cattle is right. The creatures have their use to it. They have." So Tomas protested.

"I'll likely come this way to-night." So Eoghan met the heartiness almost grudgingly. "If it's no trouble, ma'am," he added, with a quaint and unexpected touch of gentility that would have come more fittingly from his father.

" 'Tis no trouble at all," Cáit said.

" I'll be coming with you," Seumas said quietly, reaching for his cap by the fire.

" It's more than one will make a good job of it," said Padraic McLir, slowly moving his great figure into action.

Michael said nothing; but he took down his cap from a peg on the partition wall, and moved toward the door.

" You will not," said Eoghan, coldly. " Let you be resting in this place now, and I'll be distressed in my own concerns. The blessing of God on you!" he threw as a greeting toward his father, and, before the others could prevent him, he had opened the door and had gone into the night.

" To hell with him!" said Michael, hanging up his hat.

Neither Seumas Clancy nor Padraic McLir said anything; nor did their faces betray any emotion as they took their seats again. An awkward silence fell on the company. It was Cáit who broke it.

" He's a strange man, and a wild man. I do be more sorry for him than angry at him."

CHAPTER III.

THE little river, running now like a torrent, took its way by the left side of Tomas McLir's cabin; and Eoghan at once turned up beside it. The night was pitchy dark; it was impossible almost to distinguish the very road at one's feet, so completely had all things been merged in a universal blackness; but he did not hesitate. He halted a moment when outside the cottage, in order that the memory of the light should go from his eyes, and then at once went his way. He went slowly and deliberately, as though bringing all his senses to a concentration of service; but he did not hesitate. The swollen river had obliterated the path of rough stones that ran along its edge, and he went along the higher bank, now and again turning into the field at the back of the cottages in order to avoid the places where the bankside had fallen into the stream. The wind buffeted him with such fierceness that he would have been thrown into the river had he not, during its greater furies, steadied himself and bent low. He went slowly, and without impatience; even tenderly. It was as if he and Earth had come to so

complete a harmony that he had no complaint with any of her moods, but delighted rather in those of her moods that gave her over to his sole and individual delight. When he now and again, in order to avoid some sudden paroxysm of wind that tore along the face of the Earth, bent forward and leaned on his hands, there was something in his gesture that was almost reverential. When it recurred often together it was like a ritual.

Though he shrouded those things carefully from his fellows, though he avoided his neighbours, as they thought, in an unseemly and inhospitable desire for his own company, yet it was this strangeness that they disliked even more than than his taciturnity. It seemed to them odd; and yet not so much odd as uncomfortable. It was uncomfortable because its authenticity was not doubted. He had, it is true, lived twenty-six of his nearly thirty years among them; but that was a small thing to a people who reckoned familiarity by generations of acquaintance and intermarriage; by generations of generations, living in the unconscious memory of their blood. Moreover, Michael O'Clery from the day when he had first come into the island had lived a separate life, proud in himself and sensitive with others. He had come with young Eoghan and none knew why he had come. At that time it could not be said that any district in the Western parts of Ireland was gentle for habitation; rack-renting, alien repression, almost unhindered vindictiveness and the senseless and cruel hatred with which the oppressor inevitably hates the oppressed, had taken care for that; and so Michael O'Clery had a miserable site on the bog allotted to him at an extortionate rent. It seemed strange to the people of the place that a man who manifestly was of a gentler culture, and who appeared to come with a small stock of money, should have selected such an abode.

Then, after some years, rumours had slowly spread abroad that he had been a hedge schoolmaster, and that he had come in the desire to get as far aloof as possible because of some trick his wife had played on him. None could discover what the trouble was; save that his wife was yet alive; and since his strangely delicate and separated figure had now the shadow of trouble behind it, kindness made all allowance for him. "'Tis the weight of sorrow is on him, the creature," said they; "he's moidhered with thinking of his griefs; let him alone now." So he was not hindered, till a new gene-

ration arose to whom his trouble was a tradition and his aloofness an active irritation. Yet neither the old nor the new generation could tell particularly what the trouble was. So he was left with his son, who now began to provoke resentment on his own account.

Father and son did not agree. It was not merely that on all subjects the old man's alert and eager will at once inevitably stung into fury his son's flaming masterfulness. The opposition was more subtle than that. Their disagreement was based on the violent repulsion that lives, like fire at the heart of Earth, in all strong attractions. Father and son tortured themselves in torturing each other; and though neither would have thought of flinching in opposition, the least pain to either caused agony to the other.

Thrown together thus for twenty odd years, their mingled attraction and repulsion had had varied opportunities of exercise as Eoghan had developed from sensitive boyhood to passionate manhood. There had only been one interruption to their curious partnership, and that interruption had brought a change of attitude. Eoghan's strengthening revolt against his father's exactions had culminated when he was about twenty, in his marching out one day from the cottage; and for nearly two years the island knew nothing of him. When he returned little was said between father and son; and relations were resumed as though they had never been interrupted; with this difference, that now when they contended they contended on the basis of equality, as men together. Eoghan said nothing definitely of the way in which he had spent the two years; but it became understood that he had joined a band of tinkers, had picked up some curious rites while with them, and had finally quarrelled with them, celebrated that fact in a fight in which he had felled two of the company, marching straight from Kerry, where this had occurred, back to Maolan.

CHAPTER IV.

EOGHAN surveyed the hearth-fire, now almost extinguished and bare to the shrieking wind, from the side of which Michael had lamented and discoursed to him. The noise of the little river, running beside the cabin, could be heard

through the tumult of the wind; but the wind drowned all else in a loud crying round the upstanding walls of the cottage. With a simple lack of perturbation that became almost commanding, he managed at length to light a lantern, and with this to overcome the density of darkness he set about within the cottage to see what damage had been done.

The dim light it threw fell on the open rafters and wood-work of the roof; from the sides of which the scraws of turf, now that the thatch was blown off, fell, sodden with the rain. Many years of turf-smoke, and steady neglect, had coated the rafters as though with tar; and when the faint reddish light fell on them they glistened blackly where the rain had wet them. It was a single room cabin, with a ramshackle bed each side of the fire. The floor between the two beds, and a path that led across the earth to the hearth, was the only open space available in the cottage; the further end being thick with lumber, most of it unrecognisable now, being coated with dust and blackened by smoke. The dilapidations and lumber had accumulated for many years; and, indeed had for long been in that state when to have arrested the accumulation would have meant the destruction of the frail cottage. By a law of give and take it had begun to support itself by its dilapidations. Eoghan had several times attempted a half-hearted clearance in earlier days; but on his return from his travels had found things in a state that defied interference.

The scene, thus, on which the orange-red flicker of the lantern fell, was, from whichever point of view one chose to regard it, either picturesque or pitiful. Little or no wall was to be seen, the two beds and the further lumber successfully obscuring most of it. What was to be seen was deep-brown with reek-stain. The liveable end of the cottage, and the two beds in it, made a show of decency; but this was now the more hopeless and uninhabitable end. Eoghan had revived the fire, and now by its light, and the feeble light of his lantern, he surveyed the great clots of earth that had bespattered the floor. The light illumined him, from the bog-clauber on his boots to the green cone-shaped hat that was pulled over his eyes. He looked a desolate figure, for all the cold indifference of his manner.

The lumber at the far end maintained the roof, and thus transposed the inhabitable portion of the cottage into the only part of it that was in some degree weather-proof.

Where he stood the rain fell upon him, driven by the tempest and dripping from the torn roof. Down the hearthside wall the rain streamed, falling with a hiss and sizzle into the hot ashes of the quickening fire. It was a miserable spectacle as he flashed his lantern about to survey it, but his calm seemed unbroken, unearthly even.

As he turned the lantern around its light fell on a recess at the head of his father's bed, and for the first time a hint of agitation seized him. Rapidly, with a sudden surrender of his calm, he got within the bed, and drew carefully out from the recess his father's books. Deep within the recess the rain had not yet attacked them, and with great tenderness he bore the precious handful to the other end of the cottage, and placed them within a shelter he improvised there. Twice he made the journey, and finally put his hand deep into the recess lest he should miss any. He drew out an old bundle of letters. Puzzledly he bore them over to the fire to examine them more closely. They were written in a long penmanship, pointed and large and manifestly feminine. Undoing the bundle, he turned them over in his hand for more careful examination. Passionate love-letters they were, and all addressed to someone who was called "Eugene." The tempest of love they declared stirred him curiously, until suddenly, from some phrases in them, he realised that they had been written to his father. With a quick shame at his prying, he tied them together again, and put them within the breast pocket of his coat.

Sitting there on the three-legged stool, he continued gazing into the fire, uneasy and troubled. All his imper- turbable calm was gone, and his whole manner signified that some old emotion had been troubled into activity. Then he sprang to his feet, and strode out into the naked storm of the night, into the darkness like a heavy pall that the hearth- light had but slightly disturbed.

He stumbled along among the stones and through the running water of the *boithirin* outside the cottage before he found the slow apprehensive step that rarely caused him a stumble. Soon he halted, for the noise of the water was loud at his feet; and there by the edge of the little river he stood. His mind was fixed upon the letters he had read. How came it that his father was addressed as Eugene? That was, as he knew, but a clumsy and old-fashioned angliciza- tion of his own name; and therefore gave him part of the

ancestral hint with regard to himself that he had so long sought. Yet who was his mother, whose letters were so treasured, but who was never mentioned, whose name was avoided rather as though she were living than as though she were dead? What was the mystification attaching to her, that so often had troubled him? He had often wished to ask his father; but respect and pride had interposed.

The loud noise of the water and the cry and wail of the wind over the bog with its piercing note through the hair on his face, were at first the only things to disturb his thoughts. But now slowly he became aware of the deeper booming of the wind around the hills from which the river came, and the more varied muffled note over the spread bosom of Earth, and the questionings dropped out of his mind. He gazed into the night intently as though to perceive something, though the darkness merged all things. He was crouched and bent forward, leaning against the huge force of wind; but slowly his position changed. Still leaning against the wind he straightened, and low sounds of delight broke from his throat. They were scarcely human at first, but the change in him continued, and his arms lifted and widened out to their fullest expanse. Silence came on him with grandeur, and then a sound as of inexpressible yearning could be heard in the temporary lulls of wind. In the meantime, though he did not move from the place in which he stood, his body swayed and changed its position in a kind of rhythm, as though waves were passing through him, as waves might cause sticks to sway that lie on waters through which they pass.

He had stood so an hour and more before there came to his ear, in a lull of wind, the faint sound of a boot striking against a stone. It came to him as though down long distances of time, and whether it had been immediately occasioned, or whether it was a trick of his memory, he could not tell; but, almost without his volition, he found himself moving up the *boithirin* to the cottage.

When he entered he saw Michael McLir beside the fire surveying the damage. It was the last person he could have expected to see; but he showed no surprise. Michael was arrested by the strange light on Eoghan's face, and the strange, haughty wildness of his expression; but he also gave no hint out of the order of things. He merely said:—

“ 'Tis a bad business.”

“ Wasn't it waiting for a night to strip it? ”

“ Did you try pulling it over? ”

“ There's a power in it would have a single man flapping about at the end of a rope like a hen you would be holding at the legs.”

“ It's past the holding of two now.”

“ The thatch is old and the scraws are sodden, though it was bound well itself, you can hear.” And indeed the cords that had been torn away were beating against the wall and the roof with a noise above that of the storm.

There was a long silence between the two before Michael resumed, yet neither of them was restive under it.

“ There's nothing will mend it this night, and that's a sure thing. It wouldn't be too bad to save it made the worse. I have a bit of rope itself.” And he threw on the earth a length of rope he had been carrying on his arm.

Eoghan said nothing, but just picked it up and examined it. Then, still without a word spoken, the two men set to work so to bind down the roof that the damage might not spread further. For nearly two hours they worked at a task which, in such a fury of wind, was no light hazard; and finally succeeded in binding back the thatch almost to the gable-end. The rain now, arrested and caught by the thatch, poured freely in upon the floor; but the subsequent labour had been halved.

Then when the task was done Michael said :—

“ Himself is badly.”

“ He was badly before he left this place, and the power of the storm was near the killing of him. I didn't doubt that he'd be stiff itself by the time I struck the village.”

Eoghan, perspiring from his work and glowing with the comradeship it implied, was heartier than usual in his tone. There was something almost pathetic in the disappearance of his aloof manner. There was a childlike appeal in the haste and warmth of his words, that made one feel as though anything should be done rather than expose it to rebuff. And yet, as he stood there with his red hair and beard dripping with the rain, and his deep blue eyes staring wildly from the clear complexion of his skin, there was something terrifying about him. The difference between the two men was accentuated, for Michael was stolidity itself.

“ You'd a right to stop back,” he said. “ This should be a poor place to sleep itself.”

“ I will not,” said Eoghan in a momentary assumption of haughtiness. “ I’ll come in the morning to see himself, but I’ll rest in this place now.”

The two stood in silence again; then Michael turned to go.

“ The blessing of God on you ! ” he said.

“ The same to yourself.”

When Michael had clattered out into the night, Eoghan wonderingly sat smoking his pipe by the fire, and drying his clothes before he turned to the other end of the cabin to make himself a bed among the lumber. Yet, as he slept, the storm raged wildly without, and the sense of Earth, on whose bosom he lay, never once left him. In his sleep, too, she influenced him.

CHAPTER V.

ABOVE Islean coming from Barnaran, the road swings round to the right and down a hill before turning about again to resume its course into the village. It rises from Bailawnach up into Barnaran on the ridge of the heath, continuing along below hills and heath, to resume sea-level at Islean; and during its journey it overlooks the fields and foreshore that felt the full rage of the storm. Save where the bank of the southern ditch gave a moment’s shelter, the wind searched every foot of the road; and those that had business between Islean and Barnaran forwent it wisely, weather-hardened though they were. The stream that strikes beneath the bend of the road was swollen to a torrent, and the roar of wind caught its waters and flung them in drenching spray on to the *boithirin* that rose upward at the turn of the road towards a cottage set in the side of the hill.

From the cottage little of the village could be seen. From the road, in the dense darkness of the night, the lamp shining in the window of the cottage was almost like a beacon. Its light thrown down the *boithirin* caused the wet stones to gleam, and made the darkness almost palpable. On any dark night, without the perplexities of wind and rain, the roadway was twice as difficult to keep once that light had puzzled the eye; but with drenching rain driven on a wind often sufficient to lift a traveller off his feet the light was like a wrecker’s beacon. Immediately below the *boithirin* a stone

wall banked the hillside where the road swung away to the right; and unless familiarity had bred its own instinct that stone wall on stormy nights was the occasion of much pitiful blasphemy.

Within the cottage Maurya Flaherty sat knitting by the fireside, with the stool so placed that the light of the lamp might fall over her shoulders upon her work. Every now and again she lifted her eyes carefully from her work and watched her daughter's curiously nervous movements about the place. She was a woman well-set in years, of an open, fearless face, weather-beaten and handsome now with the new dignity time had given to an original strength of feature. Her very pose as she sat, with her set shoulders and straight back slightly thrown forward as she bent over her work, suggested one who walked swinging herself forward in firm, careless strides; a suggestion that was both intimated and completed by her muscular limbs and strong thick frame. She wore a scarlet short petticoat, and it revealed her grey worsted stockings and heavy boots as she planted her feet firmly on the floor, gathering her knitting in her lap. Her puce bodice was mainly hidden by her outdoor shawl. This was figured in brown on a white ground, with a broad border of light yellow and scarlet, and had been thrown over her shoulders to protect her from the wind that searched its way through the window. Her hair was greyer than her years implied, for there was no wrinkle on her broad forehead or her strong tanned face, and her light blue eyes flashed quickly and searchingly in the firelight as she lifted them every now and again to watch her daughter.

"What makes you so troublesome?" she said at length. "There'll be no late curlew crying this time, and the night the way it is. Cannot you sit down easy, and not be so mettlesome?"

Her daughter swung round to answer her.

"Ah, will you leave me alone? Isn't the night bad enough without you sitting there and complaining? It's having me ruined with the dread every time it cries out the way it does. It's a terrible place to be living."

"Will you sit down and put your two hands to a decent bit of work? There'll be no curlew crying this night."

"And if there isn't itself? Isn't it bad enough to be living in a place puts this dread on me till I'm afraid of any way I look? The people in towns are happy to be

sheltered from this, with the hills crying out, and the wind crying out, and the darkness all places like a destruction. It'll have me ruined, so it will. Do you hear that now? I do hate this place; and glad I'd be now to go from it."

It was evident that the wildness of the storm, from which the cabin on the hillside had no shelter, had frayed the girl's nerves. At each fresh gust of wind her hand either flew to her lips, or she turned about tense and startled in its direction. Her mother's very imperturbability both disturbed her more and made her perturbation seem more marked. Her mother took no notice of her now; but only remarked ironically after a lengthy silence:

"And you to go marrying with a man that's like the wind itself for wildness and unsettlement. He'd have you destroyed by the time the first baby was come. Sit you down now, and put your two hands to a bit of work. Do you hear me? Sit you down now."

Nancy came forward as she was bidden, and sat opposite her mother. She wore the puce petticoat of the unmarried girl, and a scarlet blouse, but there was a neatness and trimness about her appearance that separated her from her mother. Her very blouse, which, though it was of the people's scarlet, was made of some silk stuff, marked the difference. Her buttoned boots, heavy though they were with clauber, and her lace collar, marked it infallibly. The only incongruous element was her petticoat; but that was stained by earth and weather and clearly spoke of the duties of her day.

She was remarkably beautiful, with a strong resemblance to her mother, that was not at first noticeable because the boldness of feature had been tempered and modelled. The rest of her accorded with that change. Her eyes were dark blue and soft, though a light shone in them that sometimes made them seem of a much lighter hue. They changed with her moods, and gave hints, too, that they would change with her age. Her hair was black, crisp and plentiful, and she wore it dressed with evident care, with as evident a pride in it. Her ease and grace, too, seemed curiously derived from her mother's bold dignity. Even in her present restlessness this was marked; but her heightened colour more than compensated for any lack of assurance in her manner. As she sat, in a mere pretence of work, she glanced apprehensively at the door that strained on its latch and would certainly

have been torn open had it not been for the pile of turf banked against it on the concrete floor.

In her fear she brought the terror of the night into the room. Maurya Flaherty's calm strength neglected it. The clean, trim cottage, well lit by two lamps and with white walls and white floor, was like a refuge of light. But in Nancy the storm found an entrance.

"Sorra neighbour to come walking this way either," she said.

"There's a deal of sense to be put into you yet," Maurya replied. "What way would neighbours come walking the road, with the night that's in it? And if it was a night for neighbours itself, wouldn't it be you walking the roads with your romancing, and leaving me to the whispers of those that should know better?"

"There's one up the path now."

Maurya turned about to listen in the lulls of wind.

"Did you shut the cattle?" she asked.

"I did. It was a boot I heard, and someone falling."

"Will you shift the sods? 'Tis likely Mary O'Docher-taigh that's heavy with the loneliness. Let you give her a help, Nancy. It's bed and asleep she'd better be than to go stirring in this class of a night."

"Did you hear that? I'll not go near it."

It seemed as though some heavy ironwork had been thrown against the door, and this was soon followed by some lusty kicking.

"If you are not the foolish girl! Stand away now."

Quickly she flung aside the banked-up sods of turf and piled others so that a support should be given to the door against the wind when it should be opened. Even so, she was thrown back directly she loosened the latch.

"Who is it in it?" she called out into the night, peering forward; and an excited voice replied:—

"It's myself, ma'am. My lamp got blown out, and my bicycle's broken on me. I don't know the road well, and it's not possible to see what way it runs in the night that's in it."

"Will you not step in out of it? The place will be destroyed with the door so."

"Will I bring my bicycle in, ma'am?"

"Sure you might. Will you not come and give a help, Nancy, and not stand gaping with your two eyes?"

The entrance was widened, and a man looking very wild and dishevelled came in pushing a bicycle before him, the front wheel of which was twisted, with some of its spokes astray. No sooner had he entered than he burst out:—

“It’s a damned night, so it is. And what’ll I do now with my bicycle broken on me? You cannot see a living stretch of the road, and I wasn’t on the road before my lamp was blown out. Did you ever see a night like this, ma’am? The angels themselves would need a touch of purgatory itself if they had to travel on two wheels along that stretch of road. Three times I was blown off; three times, ma’am; and look at me in the state I am with falling in the ditch and scrambling on the road.”

“’Tis no night to be riding.”

“And ’tis no better to be walking, damn it. My bicycle was pulled over, and me on the top of it, that way. There’s no way it can be done. And now ’tis broken on me in the end, damn it!” And he kicked it excitedly, with further damage to its spokes. “I say, ma’am,” he protested vigorously, “there’s no living person can walk the road in this night. They cannot; they cannot.” He was nearly crying with distress and anger. Maurya Flaherty tried to interpose a word; but resigned herself calmly to letting him finish. “I’m sure they cannot. It’s the devil’s own spit of a night. It’s drenched with the rain I am; and one time the wind took a hold of me, and I riding on those two wheels, and coursed me up the road and rushed me down into the ditch itself. What was the use me putting the brakes on? The time I did that didn’t the wind rise me up and put me over into the road? A body cannot ride in it, a body cannot. ’Tis no sense in it. I’m destroyed struggling with it. And it’s that dark you cannot see which is the road and which is the night. And there’s no lamp at all can live in it. I’m near killed, so I am, ma’am. Damn it, and damn it!” and he kicked furiously at the twisted wheel.

“Will you tell me who you are yourself?” Maurya asked.

“It’s the new schoolmaster,” Nancy interposed.

“James Burke’s my name, ma’am, and I’m lately to this place. I was stirring back when the rain caught me and I rested there till the fall of night. I’ve been all this time on the road, and where am I at all now, who’s to say?”

“Wasn’t it foolish to sit talking and the storm that’s in it?”

He seemed crestfallen. "It seemed pleasant so. And who could tell 'twould be such a night," he said, and he stooped to pull out a twisted spoke.

"A sleeping body could tell. Drinking porter, I'm sure."

"I was not then." His indignation was genuine, if non-committal. "Will you tell me if I'm near Barnaran or am I nearer Islean? Oh, damn it, look at the state I'm in! Have you a brush, ma'am, I could scrape the mud with?"

"Bring yourself to the heat of the fire; and let you be taking a cup of tea to warm yourself." It was Nancy who came forward to lead him to the fire, and to take his helpless bicycle from him.

"It's not cold I am, but sweating with the heat," he began, when he noticed her, and with a gesture of courtesy took the bicycle again from her and leant it himself against the wall. Then he looked sideways closely at her, and said: "If I could rest a bit I'd be glad. I'm tired struggling."

"Sure you could; the night's early yet," Nancy was quick to say.

"It's very kind of you."

He still seemed so interested in her that she became conscious of her puce petticoat. She put a clean apron about her before she took the kettle off the hook to wet some tea.

Maurya was watching him closely while she took his coat from him and set it before the fire across the back of a chair. His stubborn, black, crispy hair was displayed in a heavy mass as he removed his cap and hung it to drip with rain from a nail beside the hearth. It was like his moustache that kept its twisted shape despite the fact that it was heavy with rain. His blue eyes seemed almost luminous, so brightly they shone deep-set under his heavy brows. He was sturdily, stubbornly built; indeed, with his pouting lips, his heavy brows, his broad forehead and sturdy figure, he suggested great determination and energy but for the curious way in which his boyish petulance of manner belied it.

His whole interest seemed now to be in Nancy; and he made not the slightest attempt to mask or disguise it. It was utterly disingenuous. When he spoke he made not the least endeavour to appear as though he might possibly have been addressing Maurya. His whole attention was on Nancy; with a certain odd distraction at the back of his mind that caused him occasionally to turn with a harassed

look towards his bicycle. Nancy was conscious of this—in truth, she could not but be conscious, so direct and undisguised was it—and, though the change was welcome, she appeared to be uneasy under it. And, even as his attention was with Nancy, so Maurya's was with him. She had resumed her position on the three-legged stool; and as she sat there knitting, her eyes were constantly upon him. She did not look at Nancy; she just watched him. There was no hint in her manner of merriment; such things never disturbed her calm; nevertheless he seemed oddly to cause her some amusement. It was not evident, but came rather as a hint of what might conceivably be in the strong depths of her.

He was not conscious of it. He was not conscious of her at all. His impulsive petulance over his misfortunes seemed to be suddenly displaced by as impulsive a contentment with his present lot.

"I cried with the annoyance coming up the road," he said. "I thought surely I never would see an end to that journey. I didn't think it was so far from this place back when I came the road in the morning."

"It wouldn't be far now."

"It was far this night that's in it. Sure any way would be far this night; and there's not a bit of shelter at all to the straight blow of the wind. I was afraid when the wind coursed me up the road." His eyes grew big with the reflected terror of it. "I thought I was murdered that time. I let a yell from me; and then I went plunging into the ditch. I couldn't pull my wheel against the wind. My handlebars were twisted in my hands. I pulled them round the one way, and the wind blew the damned thing round the other; and then my lamp was out, and I coursing up in the black darkness till I was afraid, not knowing what would happen."

"Was it that time you broke the bicycle?"

"It was not. It was when I kicked it." He seemed greatly amused at the memory, and laughed delightedly. "It was like a mad thing, it was; twisting in my hands, and wrestling, and rushing on, and lepping, till I kicked it, and then it was broken!"

His infectious laughter caught her, too; but she checked herself defensively, and said:—

"That would be a foolish thing surely."

“ I did, I kicked it,” he said delightedly, not minding her at all; “ and then it was broken, the damn thing.”

“ You couldn’t ride on it, then?”

“ I could. I rode on it a little way, and then the wind took me again and rushed me up against a wall there was that time. I yelled out; I thought I was killed that time; and when I went to pick up my old bicycle the wind took it out of my hand—just like a piece of paper the wind took it out. It was pushing me over, and pulling me over, and the rain coming drenching down, and the wind making me gasp with breathing, and the sweat pouring down my back, and the rain in my shirt, and my legs and arms bruised on me, and I crying with the vexation—it was terrible! I was near leaving the damn thing after me.”

As he told his tale his eyes would grow large at the imagined terror of it; and then he would break to delighted laughter like a child at its remembered misfortune; but the tears were never out of his laughter, and the laughter was never out of his tears. But as he drank the great steaming cup of tea Nancy had made for him, the whole thing would have seemed immeasurably removed but for the wind that shrieked in the roof and tugged noisily at the door.

Nancy meanwhile was looking shyly at him, for as the blood came brightly into his cheeks he looked attractively, carelessly handsome. His very untidiness helped him; for his stiffly-starched collar had fallen over his coat exposing his throat, his tie was all astray, and his hair fell rumpedly over his forehead. He had that, too, of a big child about him that made affection for him seem a natural thing.

Even Maurya looked kindly on him as she knitted. Her calm dignity did not seem so aloof. But he paid no attention to her. He did not even turn toward her in anything he said. He was seated between the two of them in front of the blazing turf, but he was twisted half about in his chair so that he faced Nancy, who defended herself from him by watching the fire, and occasionally picking up live sods with the tongs she held in her hand, and placing them on the new turf at the back. She did this so persistently as to make it evident that she was avoiding the sight of him.

“ What way will you go back?” Maurya asked at length.

“ Ah, damn it” said he, and his mouth pursed up, and his brow furrowed, in troubled distaste at the very thought.

"Why can't it stop raining and blowing? It's raining and blowing all the time."

"You could leave the bicycle after you."

"I could now, I could do that surely." he said eagerly.

"Ah, it's dark and cold it is."

He made no disguise of his reluctance to leave the fire. Nancy was watching him attentively as he sat there almost like a spoilt child.

"Couldn't he take the lantern?" she suggested.

"There's no lantern will keep alight in it," he said.

"That lantern'll keep alive in any wind," Maurya said.

"And you might hold it on the distant side."

He made a plunge at it.

"I'll be going then, ma'am; and thank you for the tea and the shelter. I was ruined coming that road."

They heard him go plunging and slipping, cursing and grumbling down the path as they pushed the door after him, and banked it again with turf. Although he had the lantern the light was still in his eyes; moreover, the path inclined sharply, and he had not much thought for matters beyond the difficulty of his way till he reached the road. Then as he went down the hill he found the shelter of the village, and his thoughts reverted to the cabin behind him. There were none astir in the village. The wind howled amongst the densely-clustered cabins; and the long streamers of rain lashed on the muddy road and along the thatches of the roofs. Lights showed in the small windows of the cabins, and threw a murky light on the pools in the road; but the darkness loomed ahead the denser for that relief.

His thoughts, however, were not with the way he went. When he was nearly through the village he stopped, and said excitedly:—

"She's beautiful; beautiful! She's like an angel."

Then just before he left the shelter of the village he stopped again:—

"I could kiss her; I could kiss her; so I could," he said; and then the wind struck him coming across the shore. Pulling his coat collar higher to protect his cheek from the rain that stung it as with hail, he plunged forward again. His coat caught about his legs; and though the wind now came against his side, it impeded him, so that his progress became a continual zigzag across the road, as the wind bore him down, and as he bore up against it again.

The breakers on the sand boomed a hundred yards to the right of him, and the lake to the left could be heard lashed into a tumult. The marsh between the two, in the midst of which the road ran, cried aloud under the wind and rain. There was no life abroad, but only he, as he struggled forward, swinging his lantern, through a desolation stricken by a rage of powers, on toward Coisabhaun; through a desolation that was itself part of that rage of powers.

CHAPTER VI.

THE dawn of day crept slowly over the land, and, in a momentary lifting of the streaming clouds of rain, shone silvery on the hinted shape of Oileanliath set in a burnished energy of waters. So it shone before Eoghan as, aroused by the crying of plover and curlew that flew low to the ground, he rose and stood by the door of the cabin. He could see a part of Oileanliath around the edge of the headland; and the twisting tumult of the silver sea and the exquisite grey slope of the southern island took his breath in a start of ecstasy. He stood awhile, breathing deeply, until the streaming clouds of rain swept across that glimpse of beauty.

The wind had diminished somewhat in strength, but the storm still lashed the island. The river was a torrent; and in the chill grey morning pools of water lay between the black furrows of the fields and in the bogs where the turf had been cut away in straight black edges. Before the streamers of rain had blotted out all but the closer fields, the village could be seen clustered in the greyness of the morning, with some wisps of turf-smoke twisted down the wind in token that its people had begun to wake.

The mountains stood round the amphitheatre they themselves made of the bog in the midst of which lay the cottage of the O'Clery's. Grey clouds hid their heights in every case; and rushed down their dark sides, as the winds curled over the hidden crests and eddied down to the valley, heavy with the rain that was to shut out the momentary glimpse of landscape, and reduce the view to a few surrounding fields black with sodden earth and lashed by the streaming rain.

With a sudden shudder Eoghan swung-to the frail door;

and propped it again with the wooden beam that held it against the wind. The cottage looked miserable enough within. The floor about the hearth was covered with pools of water, the walls streamed with water, and the two beds each side of the hearth wrung from him a cry of distress as he looked on them. He had hoped to set himself some breakfast; but one glance at the hearth was enough to show how fruitless an attempt to light a fire would be. So, waiting until the worst of the rain had passed away, he set out beside the river to the village.

Near the village he passed Padraic McLir's cabin, and Padraic himself was astir to give him a greeting. His huge form leant over the stone wall, and his broad, kindly face peered across at Eoghan searchingly.

"I heard Michael went to you last night," he said.

"He did so. He saved the thatch on me, though the place is badly. 'Twas decent for him."

"There's many would have helped you, so they would, though you're a proud man itself. It would be a strange people wouldn't help a man, and he in trouble. Himself and me were troubled to think of you sleeping in that place, and the great storm was in it." Padraic expressed himself slowly and with difficulty. He himself was a reserved man, but rather because the great mass of his kindness found a difficulty in mobilising itself into words. Usually he was in the midst of action before his intentions were clear to himself.

Try as he might, the gulf between Eoghan and his fellows stretched before him now as Padraic spoke. Padraic's determined kindness touched him inexpressively; touched him far more than it would have touched many whose response had been prompt; and he could only say awkwardly:—

"It was a wild night."

"I never knew a worse. I never did. It was a very wild night. You didn't hear of the accident came to Tomas' house?"

"I did not," said Eoghan. Alarm was in him; and it brought a strange eagerness into his voice.

"One of the currachs from the shore was picked up by the wind and blown into the roof, so it was. Like a bit of straw it was picked up, and came all that way through the air into the midst of the roof. It's wedged there to this minute now. I never knew a thing the like o' that. I did

not surely. It was a great wind could do a thing the like o' that."

"Did it come all that way?"

"Every bit of that way. Michael himself came here this morning and told me. He's just after going back."

"I'll be striking the road so."

As Eoghan disappeared round the *boithirin* Padraic's son, a sturdy fellow leaning against the door of the cabin, said to his father:—

"You didn't tell him it was the room old Michael was in was hit so?"

"Won't he know that soon enough?" Padraic said; and a voice came ringing through the door:—

"Didn't you ask him to take a sup? He didn't take his breakfast yet."

"Let him go his way quickly. Didn't Michael say the old lad was badly?"

There were none astir in the village; but as Eoghan passed down the street a young man rushed out, and, seeing him, stopped.

"Did you hear of the canoe was driven into Tommy's roof?"

"I did."

"Wasn't that a great thing? Like one of the old heroes throwing his spear. Wasn't Tomas amazed to see that thing coming launching into his house when he thought it was safe by the harbour? Driven right into his roof it was, and it's stuck there yet." And he ran merrily down through the cottages.

As he turned about, Eoghan saw Michael McLir coming across from a further cottage through the lashing rain that had again began to sweep through the village.

"Did Padraic tell you?" Michael asked, striding ahead across to the cottage, and leaving Eoghan to follow.

"He did. I was coming when I saw him."

"'Tis sticking in the thatch yet."

Eoghan looked up and saw the strange sight of a currach half embedded in the roof above him. It had been lifted, bottom uppermost, even as it had lain held down by heavy stones on the shore four hundred yards away, and had been flung like a barb through the air with such force that half of it was driven, shivered, through the thatch, scraws and woodwork of the roof. There it now was stuck, in the far end of the cottage.

Eoghan looked up at the strange sight; and then ahead at the strong, rude figure that was clattering over the stones through the sweeping rain towards the door of the cottage.

"It's over the room where we put himself," Michael turned his head about to say. "It frightened him; and he took badly this morning. He was sleeping that time; jaded out, he was." Then as he lifted the latch he added roughly: "'Tis the doctor should be here; and Father Hinnissey too. A lad went on the mare to them. Let you come in now."

He had not concluded before the door was opened before him, and a hand pulled him.

"Will you come in now, and not stand there talking?" It was Cáit McLir, who turned at once to Eoghan. "The creature!" she said kindly. "Did you take the breakfast?" She spoke whisperingly: and there was a subdued hum of talking in the room.

"How's himself?" Eoghan asked anxiously.

"Never mind him now. There's time for that. Let you take the breakfast." And she at once began to pour him out a great cup of tea, and to put bread and butter in readiness on the table.

But a high-pitched voice arose from the inner room; and Eoghan, thrusting the company aside, at once strode in there. He saw his father, a very thin and very frail figure in borrowed clothes too large for him, sitting up in the bed and excitedly talking while the priest was preparing to administer the Last Sacraments.

"Let you refine me the meaning of this now." "Let you unfurl that into the English. You cannot do it; you cannot do it," he said angrily. "All the old learning's gone out of the land. And you to be putting teachers into them schools of yours that do only know the little things haven't any pride attached to them! You to put us out of our traditions that did teach the young and the powerful such things as were great and put uprightness to the mind! Aren't you ashamed not to refine me the meaning of that?"

"Will you mind me now, Michael," Father Martin said kindly, putting his stole upon him. "It's your soul that is the business now. Will you begin your confession? *Benedictio Dei*—" he began, and blessed him.

"You cannot." Michael cried at him. "You cannot.

“There’s no learning at all in the clergy that ought to be the leaders of the people.”

“He’s gone in his mind,” said Father Martin, turning to Tomas McLir, who stood by.

But Michael had caught sight of Eoghan, and his interest at once shifted aside to him.

“Look at you there now,” he cried, “the living spit of herself, with your proud face, and the soft lips on you, and the eyes that do be looking in the bowels of the earth to regard the forbidden generation, so they do. I’d have given you great learning if they hadn’t caused me to send you travelling up the hill to the ignoramuses with their twopenny books, and their slender learning, and the hungry souls in them. There’s great learning I’d have given you wasn’t it for them, and the rapid way you wouldn’t be troubled to learn the difficult hard things in the mind you had for necromancies. Wasn’t Ireland the great place for learning and dignity one time before England came destroying the country with her pillaging and her cruelties and the dark hatred she had and the mercantile way she has that is the ruin of all gentry and nobility in a people? I do be praying God all times that He may be merciful to Ireland, and put her up again to a great dignity. I do be praying God all times for that.”

He was whimpering quietly to himself now, negligent of all. The tears came down his thin face, pinched now and ghastly grey, and hung upon his beard, that would have been silken white but that it was ingrained with turf smoke and dust. His grey-blue eyes shone curiously against the pallor of his face, as they flashed upon the company, or looked sadly on the bed when he mumbled to himself.

Father Hinnissey, who had been wachful for his opportunity, came forward.

“Michael O’Clery, you must attend now to the affairs of your soul. There’s little úse your talking all this nonsense. Make ready to confess now. *Benedictus Dei*—,” and he waved his hand over him. The others began to leave the room.

Michael glared round at him. “You couldn’t refine me the meaning of that, so you couldn’t” he said. “Refine me the meaning of this,” and with his eyes fixed, as though by habit, on Eoghan, he began to chant a long poem of so difficult and involved a metrical scheme that his hearers

lost him. He chanted on with a gathering passion that wasted his energy visibly, until Father Hinnissey interrupted him.

"I can't stand here and waste my time on you. I came here fasting, and I am destroyed with the hunger." Then he added more quietly:—"Put other things from you, Michael, and give heed to your soul now."

But the old man's mind was upon other things; he talked on rapidly and incoherently. He tried once or twice to raise himself. At last he succeeded, but fell back again heavily, his hand convulsively fumbling with the sheets. Eoghan went quickly to him, and raised him to his shoulder; but it was of no avail; for the old man's head rolled about upon his shoulder, and presently the whole body collapsed within his arms.

There was complete silence for a time, before a woman's low caoining was heard. Then Father Hinnissey spoke—pronounced the absolution, anointed the dead body, as yet warm with life, took his stole from off him, and went into the other room through the caoining women. There they heard him say to Cáit:—

"I'm destroyed with the hunger, Mrs. McLir. Have you a sup of anything to eat and drink?"

"I've the breakfast ready for you, Father," said she. "The hens are laying only poorly, and there's some of our own bacon."

Eoghan turned about, and saw Tomas standing beside him. There were no tears in his eyes; but his face was white, contrasting brightly with the red hair upon it, and his whole frame trembled.

"There's no judgment for the like of this man," said he.

"'Tis likely," Tomas said. "We never can tell."

"He was only mindful for the greatness of Ireland. There was a great learning and a kindness on him."

"What will be, will be; and things will be happening to the end of time. I'll get herself to clear the things for the wake. The rain's coming through again. It'll be a coarse day, it will. There cannot be a change now till the wind shifts."

And he looked up where the splintered head of the currach stuck through the roof. The place had been roughly mended with thatch and twine; but the wind coming through the crannies had moved these, and the rain was

freely dripping on the floor. Outside, against the little window, they could hear the rain lashing the glass; and great gusts of wind roared about the house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE wake was a strained and painful time. During the whole of the first day and night, when the storm arose to a renewed height of fury, Eoghan sat with the dead while members of the household passed in and out. He drank nothing, he seldom even smoked. Michael came in often, drank large quantities of porter, and spoke to him in a surly and heavy way; but Eoghan said nothing; he scarcely moved; it was as though he were away elsewhere while his body kept its strange stillness from hour to hour. Tomas went in to sit with him and keep him company; and when, after some hours, he came out, he said to Cáit:—

“Ach, ’tis like sitting on Cruach Mór in the dark of night sitting next that lad. He has more acquaintance sitting the way he is than with the room full of neighbours.” He seemed stirred by the experience; for he himself sat by the hearth for a long time, as it were with an old memory touched and his critical shield dropped, looking at the fire.

Cáit sat opposite him with calm dignity.

“What is it?” she said at last.

“Ach, ’tis nothing,” he said. “There are more things in the world than any man can tell.” Then after a long spell of silence, he said again:—“It’s a poor thing to be dividing the world. Them that are away aren’t in any evil place. ’Tis no use to be putting hedges in a field that’s all one.”

“It’s strange things you are thinking of,” Cáit said, looking calmly at him.

The following day when the neighbours came in Eoghan went out. He did not return till very late that night. It was still very wild; but the storm was diminishing. When Tomas asked him if he had attended to his cattle, he looked suddenly at him, and said that he had not. Nor did he seem to know that Michael, Seumas Clancy, Padraic McLir, and

some others had repaired the roof of his house. When he learnt that, however, he became timid and awkward, even over-anxious in his thanks, and for the first time alive to his purely personal grief. He broke down in bitter tears, and was a broken figure while the neighbours stayed with him throughout the night beside the dead.

Nancy had been fretful during these days for Eoghan; and she was the more fretful because Maurya watched guard so carefully, with many hinted references to James Burke's undisguised admiration of her. Moreover, the fury of the storm kept them much to themselves; and this always made her wild for such company as took her out of herself.

On the day of the funeral she stood at the door of the cottage, and she saw Eoghan go by upon the car; but he passed like a man in a dream, and did not even turn to look up at her. This troubled her, but it nettled her more, and she went up the heath behind the cottage. From the top of the hill she could look across at the huge sheer mass of *Scráig Mór*, at the base of which lay the simple heather-grown cemetery where Michael O'Clery was to lie. She was on the hill-top before the funeral, following the road, had reached her sight. She stood watching it, until she saw the two cars turn back along the road, followed by those who had come on horseback with their wives behind them. The others she saw, like small dots in the distance, take the rough and broken path that went through the valley between her and the mountains. Then she moved down the hill, springing from hummock to hummock of the bog. She knew well enough that Eoghan would stay behind awhile, and would come up alone through the valley seeking the comradeship of the mountains.

During the day the rain had cleared away, though the wind still was a gale, and the sun was very low, lost over the edge of the heath, before she saw Eoghan come over the bog toward her. His tall, thin figure swung easily and rapidly from hummock to hummock, though she pretended not to notice him till he was close upon her. He always thrilled her with his tender, almost elaborate courtesy—the strangeness and completeness of which gave her the same emotion as might the sight of a rich ornament that she had suddenly acquired the right to claim—and now as he came forward, the petulant remark on her lips was brushed away and she felt abashed instead.

“It’s yourself that’s beautiful and the light that’s shining behind you, Nancy,” he said. “Isn’t it a great joy now to be regarding you and the big sorrow is on me?”

“I was watching for you when you went on the road, but you didn’t heed me.” She had wished to be petulant and irritable to give him something to win, but his courtesy disarmed her, and in the result she spoke rather coyly than angrily. Yet inwardly she resented her disarmament. He had not even touched her hand.

“I wasn’t minding anybody at all in the trouble was on me; I wasn’t minding anybody at all till the time I saw you standing in this place, and I in my sadness walking on the road below. It was like a weighty burden falling from me that time and it’s you were beautiful standing in the light behind you.”

He had taken her hand now, and was bending over her. She thrilled always when he spoke in that low passionate way. It gave her a curious sense of luxury, as though she were being played upon like an instrument. She had now only a vague sense of the words he spoke, but she leant against him and rested her head against him, inviting the arm that went about her, courteously rather than with demonstrative passion. He thus always made her desirous for the passion the strange magic of which came to her in his voice but was denied her in the embrace. Rough passion she could have understood, but this great tenderness bewildered as it fascinated her.

“I’ll be coming out to you any more now, with the great wonder of beauty that’s on you,” he said, bending over her. “Surely to God herself would be agreeable if Tomas McLir came with me.”

“You couldn’t be coming so soon now. You’ve a right to be waiting yet.” She shrank from him suddenly. It was one thing to meet this sort of a man at strange times on the heath behind her cottage, but another to see him within that cottage arguing a match. Besides, he was becoming suppliant now; and in that mood she had almost a contempt for him.

“Would you have me to be waiting, Nancy?” he asked anxiously.

“You couldn’t be coming now, and you after burying your father!”

“I couldn’t; it’s right I couldn’t,” he said. All his usual

insecurity in dealing with his fellows rushed on him. He looked awkwardly and suspiciously at Nancy; for here was a human being from whom he could not withdraw; with her he had to face out a lack of sympathy.

"It would be right to be waiting, and it's often we can meet this way over the heath itself." Her words were an invitation to him to resume his fierce wooing. But he was uncertain of her.

"Did you ever think of me to be marrying with you?" he asked. Trouble and grief were marked on his face as he bent to ask his question; and with his trouble came helplessness, and with his helplessness the shade of contempt in her mind deepened and hardened.

"I did, of course. But it's strange ways to be thinking of that now."

She began, as she spoke, springing up the hill slowly and easily, and he went with her troubledly. There was cause for her movement, for there was a long stretch of awkward hummocky bog running up the hill, that would be difficult to negotiate in the darkness that was rapidly falling upon them. But the fact distressed him nevertheless, and made him almost pathetically suppliant.

"What way couldn't I come up and be seeing herself? Sure it needn't be for a while."

"Herself's the stubborn woman, so she is. She'll never flinch. She does be watching me all times, and she'll ask me now what was it kept me so long; and all the lonesome evening she'll be talking of the curlews that do be crying an odd time, and the strange sort of birds they are surely."

It was curious the way in which their respective positions had become changed. He felt he was stepping wrong in all he said and did; but he had lost the power to right himself. He was almost distraught, not knowing what to do; whereas, had he but withdrawn himself into his reserve, or plunged into passion, she would have answered to both moods immediately. But with his painful attempts to win her she became peevish and contemptuous.

"Nancy," he cried to her, "it's a great love does be burning in my body for you, and I doubt you don't love me at all."

The passion in his voice touched her more nearly.

"It's hard always to be only loving the one man," she said. "'Tis like a baby a man is, and ne'er a one loved but

the one baby." Her manner was hard; and his distress was beyond the power of words.

They parted at the top of the hill at her wish; and while she went into the gathering darkness he gazed hungrily after her. Long afterwards he turned about, and drifted rather than walked, along the brow of the hill towards the further mountains. The wind had died low, and Earth breathed quietly in the darkness as the frost turned her breath to mist in folds above her face. The terror of her playmood had gone, but a new one had taken its place. It was as if she impressed her presence through the coming night; but Eoghan, who was an Earth-child more consciously than any of those others who yet bore her imprint, failed to find touch with her presence. He was troubled, and wandered to and fro distraught in his grief.

CHAPTER VIII.

NANCY gave no further thought to him as she went down the hill. He had failed to thrill her, that was all she knew; and her only thought was to get back to the cottage and out of the night that always made her uncomfortable. She expected sharp words with her mother, but she did not mind that. Indeed, it might be diverting. It would at any rate provide the distraction for which her mind was seeking.

She went slowly, for without Eoghan to give her confidence in the darkness she was always fearful. But when she came behind the cottage the sound of voices caused her to stop. She went quickly to the window that looked up the heath and cautiously peered within. There was no reason why she should do so; but it gave her a sense of mystery. Her mother faced her on her usual stool; and with his back towards herself she saw James Burke, their visitor of the other night. She stood watching them awhile. They seemed to be holding a very fragmentary kind of conversation. Her mother was knitting, and looking up occasionally to address some remark to her visitor. James Burke was twisting a bicycle spoke in his hands; with a petulance and discontent expressed, not only in his pose, but in the way in which he was wrenching the spoke.

Nancy continued to watch them, sensing the atmosphere

keenly. She divined the cause of James Burke's visit as she would never have done had she been present within the house when he arrived. So she washed her face at the stream, and preened herself, before she made her entrance.

The way in which James Burke leaped to greet her assured her now if she had doubted before. Apparently he was a man to whom any attempt at disguise was impossible.

"And did you come at last?" he said. "And don't you look beautiful now?"

"Isn't it a wonder now to see you here, Mr. Burke?" she said. "And did you come for your bicycle?"

"I did," he said pouting.

"Surely it's the great wonder you left going till so late, with the darkness that's coming on it. You'll never find the road right, and the wheel destroyed the way it is. It'll be hard to push so."

"Ah, leave it the way it is," he broke out. "Didn't it give me trouble the night before without me being ruined with it again?"

Nancy was, as if carelessly, putting an apron about herself, when her mother's voice broke in quietly and incisively:—

"What kept you?"

"Straying after the cattle, I was," Nancy said, carelessly enough, but with an undisguised ring of defiance in her voice.

"You didn't hear any curlew, I'm sure." It was curious to note the covered defiance mother and daughter showed each to the other; and Nancy rose to her mother's dignity, too, very strangely in the implied war.

"'Tis a great place for the curlew, so I'm told, from the heath that's above to the shore that's below." Before the war could develop James Burke broke in upon it, as though afraid that the conversation would exclude him, and make his departure automatic. "Now it is only the green plovers we do get at Coisabhaun. They're wailing and crying and squealing all the time in the fields down by the strand; great droves of them. It is hard to get near to them to hurl a stone at them, I can tell you, ma'am. In Roscommon, where I come from, ma'am, it is the same kind we do get. All over the fields they do be. A body there told me that in this place there would only be the golden plover,

That's what he told me; and a great man with the birds he was, too. There's not the divil of a thing he didn't know about them. But 'tis green plover we have at Coisabhaun, ma'am, and not the wink of a golden plover did I see yet."

"Them sort do seldom come here, Mr. Burke," Nancy broke in calmly, arranging her hair before the mirror. "It's the curlew we do have here, and they do be always crying out in the evening and in the dawn of day. That's the sort herself was alluding to."

Even implacable Maurya was quelled by this calm assumption of her position. Moreover, not only was she outflanked, but she was silenced, and Nancy captured and held the conversation with James Burke to his undisguised delight. Maurya, indeed, was mystified; and this was apparent, despite the imperturbable dignity of her manner, by the close searching glances she kept throwing up at Nancy as she knitted. For Nancy was quite boldly playing James Burke up to the top of his bent; and in his excitement his admiration of her shone forth as clear as the day. She did not coquet; there was too much cold roguery in it to merit that term; but it had the effect of coquetry on James Burke.

Maurya knew well enough that Nancy had been out to see Eoghan, and the lateness of her return was sufficient proof that she had succeeded in her intention. How then came it that she should seem so clearly to be coquetting with James Burke? Had it been overt it would have been one thing. Already Maurya had been dallying in her mind with the thought of James Burke. And Nancy's lateness had disturbed her calculations, but not so much as this sudden new move on the part of the girl. For the coquetry might have been open mockery, so double-edged was it. James saw no double-edge; it was his best security, this childlike enthusiastic impetuosity of his. But Maurya saw it; and it puzzled, therefore disturbed her. The touch of contempt implied in it, moreover, arrested her.

She determined to put an end to the situation. Setting her knitting down firmly, she rose up and slung the great pot of potatoes from the chain in the chimney. The steam rose in a cloud as she lifted the lid. Then swiftly she set two places at the table.

James Burke watched her with furrowed brow and big

pouting lips. He was comfortable; he was happy; and he had not a mind to stir, but these preparations were only timely, and drove into his consciousness, what was always an uncomfortable recognition for him, that time stood still neither for his concerns nor for his pleasure. So he rose, and said, with a bad grace: .

“It’s my own supper will be waiting before me.”

“Will you be going home for the Christmas, Mr. Burke?” Nancy asked.

“I will,” he said. He looked a picture of misery.

“You’ll rest long likely.”

“I will. I’ll be going to-morrow for a week.” He stood in the middle of the floor, looking discontentedly across the room at her.

“It’s a great pity now. We were fattening a goose for the Christmas, and it’s likely some of the neighbours will be visiting.”

If he had looked discontented before, it was nothing to the misery he presented now. His attitude suggested rebellion against the malign fate that had imposed on him the holiday at Roscommon he had arranged with such wild joy a week earlier.

“It’s the way always,” he said. “I do be always out of every good thing.”

He dragged out his bicycle as though it were responsible for his misfortunes, and thumped it into the middle of the floor. He was as complete a picture of crossness and vexation as it would be possible to find; and his annoyance was as ingenuous as his admiration. The lack of sympathy with his woe only made him the worse. But it made it impossible for him to delay his departure longer. Pulling open the door he peered out into the darkness. There was a faint glow in the south-western sky over the sea, and against it the land could dimly be perceived swelling and falling in flowing black waves. Like a very pale ribbon the road could be seen advancing across the land, and disappearing beneath the hummock of the hill, behind which the cottage was set.

“It’s dark enough,” he said, looking down the path. Then with a sudden smile he added: “Would you mind helping me to the road with the bicycle? I’d break my head going down the path with it rising above me on the one wheel.”

"Wouldn't that be neighbourly?" Nancy said quickly, going to his assistance.

Maurya watched them as the two of them took the bicycle out through the door into the night, Nancy going ahead down the path, guiding the sound wheel and James Burke tenderly lifting the broken wheel. She heard them discussing the best method of procedure as she turned again to the pot of potatoes.

When they reached the road he turned the bicycle about so as to push it before him, and as he did so his hand fell on hers on the bicycle seat. Thrilling at the unexpected warmth he held hold of it tightly, his heart beating wildly at his boldness. She made no effort to withdraw it for a moment or so; then she withdrew it sharply.

"Ah, why did you do that?" he said, breathing hard, and pressing against her.

"Let you be stirring now," she said, and, though she was excited, there was a hint of amusement in her voice in the darkness.

"Give me the hold of your hand a minute," he said excitedly. "You're that beautiful, Nancy, you're the wonder of the world."

"Don't be romancing now," she said, but she did not move away from him.

His excitement had caught her; and her keen dalliance with his excitement was like an invitation to him, striking on him through the darkness. He tried to take her hand, and as she turned away from him to frustrate his attempt he in desperation, flung his arms about her and struggled with her. She was frightened, for it was plain he was excited beyond all control. She struggled to get loose, and they both fell over the bicycle where it had fallen from his hands.

"Are you hurt?" he said finding her in the darkness and helping her to rise.

"Isn't that queer kind of play, Mr. Burke?" she asked angrily.

He was abashed and humbled, and begged for forgiveness.

"It was the beauty of you, Nancy, that went rising to my head. It was a great wickedness came into me. Why did I do it? Amn't I the damned fool now ruining myself in your good opinion? There's no right for you at all to have

that beauty like the great mounting flame to wither up my mind. You won't tell herself now?"

"Why should I tell herself?"

"But you won't, you won't. Tell me you won't."

"What call should I have to tell herself? It isn't any business of hers. No: I won't, I tell you, and let you go now."

"Will you forgive me?" he pleaded.

For answer she merely said "Good-night to you!" and turned aside up the path, leaving him humbled in the road till the sounds of footsteps up the road made him raise his bicycle on its rear wheel and push it before him.

When Nancy entered the cottage her mother looked sharply at her.

"What's all the dirt on you, and what happened you?"

"It was that bicycle. 'Tis no way to take a twisted bicycle, down a path like that."

"Did you fall with it?"

"I did."

She was flushed and silent all through the meal. Afterwards she sat by the fire moodily. The humility of both men to her angered her strangely. James Burke had gone on his way thinking his roughness had turned her against him, whereas the only thought that rankled in her mind was his supplication for forgiveness. The memory of his pleading that her mother should not be told of his attempt to kiss her, stirred her contempt. As if it was any business of her mother's! But had he tried to kiss her? Or had he only tried to capture her hand? Possibly he was timid in his wish as well as contrite because of it. She did not even think of Eoghan. His supplication in the first instance—he who so oddly and so often thrilled her either by his cold reserve or in the rarer moments when his passion and fierce wilfulness almost terrified her—had started her mind's reaction; but now her thought was filled by this young enthusiastic boy who made her feel that she was as much above him as a mother is above her child. Thence her mind wandered to the men of the island—proud, reserved men, some of them; who yet seemed so contemptibly foolish before her, whom she could will by her sex. There was only one person, now that she came to think of it, over whom she did not feel that superiority, in directness of desire and decision of will; and that person was her mother.

Oh, yes, and others, too; women could compel equality with her, if only by disparaging the beauty of which she had heard so much; only women, and dreaming old men. What was it, and how was it? She looked up to find her mother's grey-blue eyes fixed on her.

"Aren't men the queer things, mother?" she said.

"Let you be careful now, Nancy, 'Tis better to be managing the one man, if he's the wild man itself, than to go romancing with and thinking on and laughing at the many. Don't go laughing at men and don't let men go laughing at you, and there won't be the big store of misery for you by the mercy of God. Let you heed now, and let you have a regard for yourself, for it's in the mind itself the trouble of the world does start."

CHAPTER IX.

EOGHAN was distraught with grief, not knowing how to conceive this sudden caprice, almost this distaste for him, on the part of Nancy. She had, as he saw it, quite clearly and distinctly sought him out, at a time when his mind, racked with the thought of death-in-life and life-in-death, had dispelled her from memory. He had seen her suddenly, almost like a buffet of joy, standing on the darkening hillside beneath the flushed evening sky; and to the wild joy of that sight had come the thought, so exquisite in refinement that it humbled him infinitely toward her, that she had sought him out to comfort him in his sorrow. He had dropped all the guards his sensitiveness had assumed, even against her; and she had coldly, even contemptuously, turned away from him, just as though she had found him out to fling him aside. The picture of her as he had so suddenly seen her, lived in his memory yet; but the refinement of joy the sight had first wakened turned now to a refinement of pain. It was not only the pain she herself had caused. All his sensitiveness was now alive.

The following morning he saw Padraic McLir's head bobbing up and down across the fields beside the river. He did not need to be told what it meant. He could see the huge form, with the scarred, kindly face, swinging steadily up the *boithirin*, coming to offer him that inarticulate sym-

pathy that had so moved him the previous day—like a hand put out fumblingly in the darkness to hold his own. But he shrank from it. He slipped behind the cabin, and, under its shelter, went agilely and quickly across the bog towards the hills. That whole day he spent among the hills, ostensibly gathering his sheep together and driving them down the lower slopes of Cruach Mór, but inwardly letting the great caress of Earth play about him.

He moved forward unceasingly, with his mind occupied with one automatic pursuit; but in the depths of him his pain and doubt were warring against the Earth-caress he had been accustomed to receive. There was need for his present occupation. During the night there had been a hard frost; and he found some of his sheep in a poor way. He drove them off the northern slopes, where many of them had clustered, over the brow of Glegeal and down upon the base of Cruach Mór, where, if the pasturage was not so kindly as round the northern bays under the mountains, there was better protection against the wind that threatened snow at nightfall. For Eoghan was an assiduous herder. The days had been when careful herding had thriven upon the hills. True, this had been in the interests of another; but the tales of it had reached him, with the result that all the little prosperity the past few years had brought him had flowed from his application of tradition to present circumstances, partly by the natural bent of his desire for the quiet company of Earth.

When he returned, the twinkling of all the window-candles under a heaven into which the stars were crowding reminded him that it was the eve of Christmas; and this set his determination to seek out Nancy. He would have done well to have avoided her, in his present state of trouble; yet it was his trouble that drove him to her.

She came readily to his call. His day's distress seemed an invention of his brain so customary was their meeting, abashed and almost defiant under the stars.

"Was herself complaining yesterday?" he asked.

"Doesn't she be complaining all times?"

"There's great hardness in old folks."

"Well, there is now."

So the first interchange went. His apprehension at first caused him to be reserved, and gave him an advantage. But he was not secure enough to hold the lead chance had

won him. His day's distress of mind came out in the unwonted diffidence with which he took possession of her hand and shyly sought to put his arm about her.

"There was great trouble on me to-day thinking I had you flittered some way in the evening that's gone."

"Is that so?" said she, and though she surrendered herself to his embrace he felt vaguely rebuffed. He did not know that, having now a sense of power over him, she was playing upon him in a cold and deliberate luxury.

"There was surely," he said, warmed nevertheless by her response to his embrace. "With the heart in me was ruined by sorrow, and an empty house itself staring at me like a wasted harvest, I was always thinking of you and of the queer hardness was on you. Maybe you were troubled yourself, for there's a load of trouble in the world all times; but I was moidhered with the lonesomeness, going about the hills, though I have the custom that way itself with the cattle."

She was thrilled. He put such a song of passion into his speech, bending over her as he was, that she quivered with delight in his arms. She murmured some inarticulate response in his arms, just sufficient to set him aglow again; and resigned herself to luxury. All the time she was wondering at him.

"I minded the soft words we did often speak on this heath in the dark of night, I minded you standing to greet me and I after returning from the burying, and I was heavy in my mind wondering what might have made you turn away from me so hardly as you did." So he complained: and she fretted at him; when he swept into a storm of passion such as she had not often discovered though she had often sought to arouse it. "Wasn't it you made me wonder at myself when I went following after you! It's a great mystery, so it is, that God put beauty upon women. My father did ever say that it was for a curse on men that He put it so. He might be lamenting itself, but there was a great wisdom on him. Wouldn't you marvel at me to be walking the hills and thinking of a girl's face, when the tinkers themselves did say a woman would never draw me for curse or for calling. They did say I had another light that dazed in my eyes. But himself did be saying a woman would be the destruction of me, as was ever the tradition of our ancestors. You're a beautiful, wondersome girl itself, Nancy, so you are; but God help you, Nancy, if you turn to a staff

that fails in my hand. God help you, and may He help me in that day."

He crossed himself suddenly as he spoke, as though it were a prayer, and no mere ejaculation, that he spoke. Nancy was still wondering, still in a luxury; yet she was startled at his vehemence.

"I'm frightened at you, Eoghan, you're that strange," she said.

A start of great tenderness took him at the thought that he had scared her, but he was still harassed with great dark clouds that confused his mind.

"I wouldn't be frightening you, my lovely, God help me so. But there do be times when I think I might be holding you in my arms itself and yet not have you at all. It comes on me like a drift of fog to Cruach Mór and the sun shining. Those are the times I could take you and lep with you in the big seas. God help me, so I could."

She was growing scared, but not so far scared but that she could enjoy the experience.

"Don't be talking so, Eoghan. You have me frightened," she said.

He was moodily silent. The memory of his day's distress, exaggerated now in memory, stung him sharply. His embrace was so strong that it hurt her.

"Won't you be lonesome in the Christmas?" she asked, restive under the continued silence.

He looked down where her face showed whitely in the darkness, suddenly and sharply, as though she had given expression to some half-felt thought of his.

"The world does always be lonesome," he said.

"Is the houseen mended yet?" she asked, anxious to continue the conversation.

"I'm heart-broke in that place, so I am. It was a great place when himself was in it. Maybe it was flittered and ruined with the age, and himself did always complain that it had him killed with the rheumatics and the ailments; but there was no liker place I'd have him. But 'tis done now. It should be destroyed with him gone out of it. I cannot sit in it. I'd do better sitting in a sod-house."

"I was never in it," she said, finding his grief more tolerable to bear when it was salted with bitterness. "It would be a poor place to be living in. Isn't it the wonder, Eoghan, the old master lasted so long in it?"

“ Ah, it’s another houseen we’ll have when ourselves are married.”

“ Wouldn’t it be strange, now, pulling that down? ” she broke in, not altogether relishing the new turn of the conversation.

“ We’ll leave it so,” he said fiercely. “ It should stand so to mind us of him was in it, and who built it with his hands, and whose living breath is in it. There was never a man sorrowed in a house but he became attached to it. That’s a sure thing.”

All the people’s talk of Eoghan’s intimacy with forbidden things crowded upon her mind as she heard him speaking. But he swung again into more familiar, though even less desirable, reaches.

“ We’ll leave it so,” said he in a dark proudfulness, even masterfulness. “ I’ll have it builded in some place that’s handy. There aren’t the troubles for building that were in it when himself came this way. Ah, Nancy, won’t it be the wonder to see you minding a houseen when yourself and myself will be in it for the masters? You’ll be beautiful so. It’s the queen of the world you’ll be.”

Homage is sweet, and she took it graciously as such, avoiding the thought of what it implied.

“ It’ll be good so,” she said; and their thoughts were upon entirely different things.

“ Ah, so it will,” said he. “ I’ll be sitting in my place with my two eyes watching you moving and minding the things, and there’ll be a great contentment on me that time. So there will, please God. Or we’ll be sitting with my two arms round you, and it’s my Deirdre you’ll be, like himself did be telling of, with the great beauty shining about you like moon whose path shines down in the sea. ’Tis the great contentment will be so; it’ll be the time of times, with the happiness moving in the little houseen I’ll build like the water does be stirring and moving in Loch Dubh in the hills. I’ll guard you that time, my lovely, when there’ll be not a one to hurt or to hinder us.”

The picture of such easy contentment set in Maolan for ever, though full of adventure for him, made no appeal to her; but the passion of his speech throbbled about her luxuriously and with the appeal of strangeness.

“ Won’t you be wandering to the mountains so? ” she asked. “ Don’t you be always going out so? They do say

your head is destroyed with the fancies come that way. It'll be a lonesome time any woman would have and you to be travelling by yourself."

Her words brought suddenly and violently across his mind the other passion of his days, that even as he stood on the heath in the dark night was no small part of the appeal that urged him. A counter-fidelity challenged him; violently almost; and for the nonce he was confused; but he intended to guard jealously the flame he now held between his two hands.

"I will not then," he said. "I'll mind you always, so I will. I'll heed you all times, Nancy; and I do be praying that such a thing may come to me. I pray for that, so I do, and I never pray else. It is all times before me, like a lantern a man would be rowing for, and he coming from the fishing."

The low passion of his words was close upon her. The intensity of his mind subdued her to him, though a part of her was left wondering at the queerness of mankind. As it were in the background, that feeling as to lack of robust sense among men remained with her, waiting to rush upon her when the present luxury was played to the full; but for the time she was subdued by the master-passion he exerted.

In the dark impenetrable night on the high heath reaching upwards from her cottage they gave themselves to embraces that were broken only by the many extravagant tendernesses he breathed upon her. They were as nearly attuned as her natural detachment would suffer her to be. His grave yet wild passion quelled her, as they stood where the earth flowed up in dark waves into the starry blackness of the night.

When they went their ways, she became more and more conscious of a feeling of satiety; whereas he trod as in a dream, dimly perceiving the rolling masses of dark earth that seemed to him as much the living pressure-giving and pressure-taking flesh of One as was the flesh of her whose embrace was yet warm on his body. He buttoned his coat as though to preserve that warmth, and his hand struck a bulge in his breast. Wonderingly he put his hand into his pocket, and half drew out the bundle of his father's letters he had preserved. Thrusting them back again, he went on his way with his mind in the glow of recovered joy.

CHAPTER X.

WHILE Nancy was away upon the heath, and her mother sat thinking angrily of her absence, Tadhg and Mary Quilter came in. Tadhg was her sister's son, and since his return from America he had never failed to make a visit on Christmas Eve. Two parcels of presents and a bottle of whiskey always accompanied him. With great ceremony, they came over from Coisabhaun, and with equal ceremony the presentation was made and the bottle of whiskey was drunk. It was mainly her expectation of this custom that had so angered Maurya when, at the curlew call above the house, Nancy left her in the middle of her reproaches.

By his money gotten overseas, by a crafty shrewdness, and by his wife's good-humoured management of himself and his affairs, Tadhg Quilter had guided his store at Coisabhaun into no small success.

"Where's Nancy herself?" Mary Quilter asked.

"Ah, now, don't be talking of her."

The unusual trace of exasperation in Nancy's speech arrested the ceremony that was beginning.

"The creature," said Mary Quilter sympathetically. "I'm sure it's moidered you are with her tramping the heath romancing with that man."

"Couldn't she keep the house this night with us coming to it," broke in Tadhg.

"Ah, let her rest so. Don't be heeding her," said Maurya.

"I'm sure," said Tadhg, particularly of nothing.

"Isn't it strange she won't stop from following him, and there's no one would think he was a likely man for her? You'd think now he'd have her destroyed with his wildness. I never met him but the few times, but they do tell the strange things of him." Mary Quilter remained sympathetically remote. There seemed a calm understanding between her and Maurya that Tadhg's alertness only marred.

"Don't be saying it now," Maurya responded. "I have remarked more divilment than fancy in the way she does be courting. Eoghan O'Clery would surely have her destroyed; but she'd have himself destroyed sooner, mind now. It's a poor thing for a girl to go taking the kisses from a

man and wondering at him. I have her measure now. It's the way trouble comes, a girl to go gallivanting and experimenting and wondering with men, though they're the queer creatures themselves we'll allow."

"Do you think that's the way it is, ma'am?" asked Tadhg.

"I do now."

"That's the way I was thinking myself. Sure now if you were to drive her to it you'd have her flinching. There was never a horse would take a drink you pushed his nose into. Bid her to be marrying. Let you not bid her mildly. Let you urge her to it roughly. Tell her it's the expectation of her neighbours her to be marrying with him and the New Year coming on so nice and convenient. If she's coltish itself her O'Clery fellow will find her a handful right enough so. There's too much simplicity on you, ma'am."

The two women exchanged glances. Mary Quilter smiled approvingly at him, whereas Tadhg very obviously began to preen himself on his smartness. Maurya looked quickly and shrewdly at him without any commitment of demeanour.

"Maybe you're right so," she merely said.

"And there's more than that in it now, mind," Tadhg went on with self-conscious importance. "Did you mind the new teacher is come to this place?"

"So I do."

"Didn't he come here, leaving his bicycle after him the night of the storm, and he fetching it again?"

"He did."

"Well, he has rare praise of Nancy. She has him fair captured. He's going about doing nothing but talk of her. It's said he has the letters all learnt wrong to the gossers, these days, with his mind running after her. It's certain he's all of a dread on her. Didn't I seek him to find the truth of the tale?"

"You did," his wife confirmed.

"I didn't show him my hand at all. I was too cute for that," he added with great self-approval. "I gave him the great advice that he should take his bicycle with him on the hooker this day, and not trust it to be mended by the smiths in Maolan. I tell you there was no need to draw him. He's the soft lad, the very one for Nancy. I gave her great praise. I told him yourself was the rich woman that did be living here because you had the habit of the place."

Maurya looked stolidly at him, without a word, in keen appraisal. He scented, however, her criticism, and quickly added :

“ I was cute there, too. I said you were close-like, in the way old folks often were ; but the money was there in the end for any man that took Nancy.”

Maurya watched him in difficulties, and calmly cut him short.

“ There’s fifty pounds will go with her if she married a man to my liking, and where’s the girl in Maolan could say more? ”

Tadhg and Mary Quilter looked at one another. It was plain they were surprised. Tadhg poured himself out another glass of whiskey, and drank it, looking meditatively into the tumbler.

“ Where’s the man could ask more? ” said Mary Quilter.

“ If she married the man to my liking,” Maurya affirmed.

“ Well, ’tis certain she has the new schoolmaster captured, and he’s the simple, nice *buachaill*. It could be a great thing for her did she but marry a schoolmaster.”

“ Isn’t there many a girl would be stricken thinking of a match like that? ” his wife confirmed him.

Tadhg was silent. A playboy fancy was beginning now to wear the semblance of an earnest enterprise. He was not now making plans ; his mind was keenly nearing the actual matter. His eager ingenuous face, with long upper-lip and inconspicuous forehead, began to wear a look of extraordinary cunning.

The two women—Maurya with her strong massive dignity, and Mary Quilter with her broad and imperturbable calm—looked on him with indulgence in which there was a certain respect due to the fact that he was now concerned with a task that was a man’s proper business. They might amuse themselves with contemplating matches, but the making of them belonged to man-kind.

Then they quietly discussed matters of larger or smaller concern ; the damage done by the last storm, the good thing it was that the weather over Christmas looked likely to be fine, the matches that might be made when the New Year’s opening was past ; all objective matters. There was no community or kindred of interest such as there would have been had men been talking. It was all dignified and aloof, general rather than intimate.

Then Tadhg broke in again.

"It'd be a good thing surely. The Burkes are farmers themselves, I believe, and they'd do something for him. There's herself only. Did you but drive her to take her romancing hardly, she'd reneague then. She'll be troublesome sure."

"If you drove her too hard she'd take to America," Mary Quilter said.

"'Tis a wonder to me she never took that notion yet. She would have, surely, but for the hardships they do tell of are to be encountered there."

"She'll be troublesome," Tadhg went on. "Anything she'll have time to think on she'll flinch from——."

"Esht!" His wife interrupted him with a quick wave of her hand. "Let you be quiet now."

She had heard footsteps without, and soon the latch went, and Nancy entered, throwing off the black shawl she had over her head.

"Is it yourself, Mary?" she said, coolly enough.

"How's yourself Nancy? There's a wee present we have for you for the Christmas."

When the Quilters had gone mother and daughter were silent for a long time. This was no rare thing, to be sure; but now the silence was tense, and irked both of them. Each felt the other groping at her through it, seeking to discover what she was thinking. Each was unduly conscious that she was so groping, and anxious not to reveal the fact. A drama of silence was proceeding in the cottage.

Nancy was the first to break it.

"Did ye speak of me?" she said defiantly.

"Them that are spoken of are quick to know it, and to know why."

A further silence ensued. In truth, the whole conversation was spoken by long spells of tense silence.

"What was it ye said?"

"Did you see your fancy man?"

"What was it ye said?"

"'Tis no great matter what it was."

"Well, they can say out what's in their head to say, and 'tis equal with me. A body cannot walk a stretch of the road but there are some to put mouthfuls of a tale to it. They can take their goods after them." And she flung the brown paper parcel containing the wee present across the cabin, where it fell with a sound of breaking glass.

Mother looked at daughter sharply, for she knew well she was eating her heart out to know what it was had been in the parcel, and what it was she had missed. But she was not going to be drawn into other wrangles. Her road was now clear before her, and she would tread it firmly.

“Were you speaking of marrying to-night on the heath beyond?”

Daughter now looked at mother sharply, startled to think what these new words and this new level tone portended.

“We might be.”

“’Tis time that word was spoke again, I’m after thinking. It’s the expectation of the world, you to be marrying; and you’ll be set to it now. It’s a wedding is expected, and it’s a wedding will staunch you in the same twist of rope. Let you bring your fancy here, and we’ll set the day. There’ll be no money from me, but the two of yourselves only; and you’ll be set to it so. ’Tis time, and full time, a bolt was put to your romancing, and it’ll be a great love-match surely. Maybe he’s lonesome itself in the houseen he’s after mending. There’ll be grand cleaning in it for yourself; grand cleaning and grand company. Anyway, it’s your choice, and I’ll not gainsay it now. ’Tis time you left the singing and fell to the grunting; and we’ll have you to the priest now before he takes a notion to speak against you from the altar.”

Nancy was startled. Instead of recovering, she became more and more startled as her mother proceeded.

“We’ll likely be marrying or we’ll likely not be marrying, but it’ll be when the fancy fits me,” she said contemptuously, all the same.

“You will not so. You have your lot taken with Eoghan O’Clery; many’s the time did you toss them very words to me; and it’s your match now, fast and firm.”

“I’ll suit myself, so I will.”

“We’ll not be moidering ourselves with words to it, Nancy. I have my mind set; and I’ll be taking the cattle to the next fair, seeing I cannot mind them all myself, and a stray girl has no sense of heeding a neighbour’s goods. Let you tell Eoghan O’Clery the next time you’ll be greeting him to come this ways and we’ll put a match on it, though it’ll be a cold match itself.”

The following evening was Christmas evening, and though the cry of curlew rang out on the heath behind the cottage,

Nancy made no shift out of the house. She turned hot and cold, knowing her mother's attention was on her; but she pretended to be engrossed in the hilarity of the neighbours that had entered the cottage. The cry became indistinct, and lost all initiative skill, but she maintained her presence, and maintained it at last with fair seeming.

CHAPTER XI.

TADHG QUILTER took great credit to himself when, two days after St. Stephen's, he saw James Burke driven past his haggard on Sean Clancy's car. He went in to the little store to say so much to Mary. She smiled on him indulgently, wondering that any man could be so foolish as to mistake for his own handiwork the havoc that women might be trusted to work for themselves; and he returned to his stacking of timber, hardset not to smile too obviously in self-pleasure.

He expected some goods by that day's hooker, and it was necessary that he should tidy his shed in readiness for them; but it was too much to expect that he should remain unconcerned, and the morrow was long, so he moved off down the road towards O'Dochertaigh's, in the hope that he might happen to meet James Burke.

Chance favoured him. James was also uneasy; he was cold, too, after his travelling; and thus drifted in for a bottle of stout soon after Tadhg.

"It's a cold sort of a day, Mr. Quilter," he said, squaring his shoulders on seeing Tadhg.

"You're heartily welcome back. Will you have a bottle? Sheila, another bottle now. You're early back."

"Well, do you know now, they were telling me that the weather was bad coming on us, and that I'd do well to take this day's hooker. And that's how it was."

"You're right, too, so you are. It's the bad weather will soon be on us. 'Tis too long fine for this time of the year."

"They had a load of your stuff aboard."

"Ah, I'm expecting it. Well, *slainte mhaith agat!*"

"*Slainte!*"

"Did you have great pleasure-making in the Christmas?" Tadhg asked, setting his glass down with a great sigh.

"We did, we did." James Burke's face was flushed, his blue eyes shone brightly, and with his tough black hair and moustache, he made an engaging stock of a figure as the eagerness came into his smile.

"I doubt you had a drop of the right stuff your way. They say 'tis made a little there, too."

"Well, it's hard to get it down so far, it is; very hard. The polis are watching too carefully; and by the time they've their drop taken there's not much to a few gallons. Do you know, and at the Christmas they've great appetites. You'll have another bottle now, Mr. Quilter, you will!"

"Another bottle only. I've great work to be done today. *Slainte arist!*"

"*Slainte mhaith!*"

"Maurya Flaherty and her Nancy were over to us St. Stephen's, so they were."

James Burke blushed red, but his whole attention fastened keenly on Tadhg. Only for a moment was he diffident, and half inclined to appear to brush the matter away. Tadhg's manner was so provocatively full of information that it was impossible for him to maintain that attitude. Some might have thought that Tadhg's demeanour was too palpably tempting, for indeed his scarcely concealed cunning gave him the appearance of a conspirator. He was as childlike in his plotting as James Burke was in his eagerness. He threw James Burke a prodigious wink, and went promptly out into the road.

James followed him. Tadhg was walking contemplatively up the road in the cold sunlight. The houses lay only on the south side of the road, so that he was outlined against rolling masses of cut bog, the sides of which shone purple black with gleaming brown and silver pools below. The waves of bog rolled away two miles across the valley where *Scráig Mór* rose sheer, sharply outlined against a sky of delicate blue. The southern sun fell against it, and shone on the blue rocks scattering in long lines down the brown heather. There was great space, and rich colour well kneaded into the substance of earth, everywhere. And Tadhg Quilter slouched up the rain-scarred road with a monstrous assumption of negligence, and James Burke went after him with eager, curiously delicate steps.

"Let you not be seen talking too seriously to me. We're talking of the weather only. Mind that now!" And

Tadhg quizzed the blue sky through which wisps of cloud were floating.

It was one thing to tell James Burke this, it was another to get him to heed it. Tadhg's manner was a provocation to any curiosity, let alone the mood that had brought James posting back after an absence that had become a torment.

"I had a talk with her mother, now. She's my mother's sister, and I had a right to be speaking with her, being in the way of a man to her."

"You didn't tell her what I was telling you, I hope. You didn't do that, Mr. Quilter."

"Sure I did not. Troth, I took great credit to myself for my cunning. Didn't I tell her 'twas time now Nancy was thinking of settling down easy-like and comfortable? Says I, a girl's thoughts do be running after all kinds of romancing till a match is put on her; and then she'll rest quiet, so she will. Maybe yourself heard the bye-talk agin her and a fellow from the village beyond?" he added to James.

"Oh, I did. You cannot think the torment it put me in; you cannot think it, Mr. Quilter. It has me destroyed thinking of it. I could kill him, I could. I could take him in my two hands—and I could—I could—oh, I could kill him so, so I could. Isn't it a torment I'm in since I left this place?"

"Don't be minding that. 'Tis talk only, that the simple people make a great blow on. Some lad has her fancy taken, and she wild with the loneliness. Let you not be paying any heed to it. Sure hasn't any girl her amusement till she is marrying? Isn't it the way of a woman to be so? Hold yourself firm now."

"But does she love him? Does she love him? I could draw the life out of him, so I could."

"It's easy to see your heart is struck. Well, maybe this lad has a mind for her, too. It's with me he'd have to be settling the match, so; for Maurya Flaherty has it left to me now, I'm thinking."

"I'll go and see her this very evening. I will now. Aren't women the curse to men now, having them destroyed the way I am?"

"Hold yourself, now. Would you go ruining all? Have you a mind to her yourself, or is it romancing you are? For

'tis time, and full time, she was marrying in the New Year, with the big money to her too,"

"I don't want her money. 'Tis herself I want."

"Well now, a hundred pounds is not to be dropped in the well all that easy. 'Twould easy your dad, too."

"My father's dead. I'll suit my own mind, Mr. Quilter. There's no girl I did ever see was beautiful like her."

"Esht, now! There'll be some to carry a tale if you talk all that loud. You're welcome back, Mr. Burke, so you are; none more welcome than yourself. Come and see herself this night and we'll have a sup of the stuff." And before James Burke could arrest him he went across the road and disappeared into his haggard.

Not knowing what to do, or how to ease the unrest that was like a fire in his bones, he turned back again to O'Dochertaigh's for another bottle of stout.

Dusk was already beginning to fall over the bog. A grey mist was settling through the valley, creeping up the sides of the further hills, and the face of Earth was slowly assuming an aspect that, even to a superficial glance, seemed in some curious way to outline him as a stranger in this place as he went disconsolately down the road. It was a constant feeling of his own vague thought. "You do never know these people," was a continual expression of his own when confronted by them wrought to a pitch of emotion. He did not feel it now; his thoughts were preoccupied with his own source of unrest; but Earth was making it, as it were, pictorially evident as he went his way.

Fighting against himself, he nevertheless drifted down the road across by the sea to Islean. The surf of the sea glowed a little through the darkness to his left, and across the loch Scráig Mór rose up, a huge figure, massive and gaunt, yet curiously wraith-like in the mist and moonlight. From the shallow neck of the island over which he drifted the further mountains and highlands seemed like a congregation that tempted only the hardy of spirit and menaced all else. He had never been among them, and there was that about him that suggested he never would be. A great silence held the valley, accentuated only by the faint lapping of the waves on the strand, and, as he went all-fluttering over the sand-dunes, there was none of that fixed unrelenting pursuit of his object that seemed to be demanded by this portion of the face of Earth. There was no strength, no calm, no

fixed resolve; and even his passion seemed of another order, less deep, more whimsically cast. The very birds that fluttered and wailed in the moonlight seemed more habitual than he. They fell in and out of the bosom of Earth like notes of music in a symphony. The people of Coisabhaun whence he came, and the people of Islean whither he went, were such notes, more abiding. Nancy herself was so, strongly so, despite her restlessness. But now as Earth bared herself he seemed not to be within the frame as he went with eager little steps from hill-mass to hill-mass across the neck of intervening strand.

He went as against his will, with his mind in a flame of excitement. He stood in the *boithirin* leading up to the cottage hesitatingly, half wishing to turn and fly back through the village, before the conjured picture of Nancy sent him plunging up to the door. The latch was open, and his greeting, "God bless all here!" spoken before he well knew what had happened.

Nancy and her mother sat in their accustomed places in the lamplight; and the sight of Nancy facing him at the far side of the fire, scanning over a bit of newspaper, stiffened him with excitement.

Both were surprised at seeing him, but in Nancy the surprise was soon succeeded by amusement and a sense of power. Thus she was not at all abashed at his eagerness.

"I was feeling lonely, and I thought I would come round," he said directly to her.

She looked coolly at him as she greeted him, and it was left to Maurya to comment on his early return.

"You're welcome back, indeed, Mr. Burke. But we weren't expecting you till the New Year itself. Wasn't it yourself that said you'd be absenting yourself the week?"

"I did, I did. And I meant to. But didn't they tell me beyond the bad weather would be setting in, and that I'd do well to be taking this day's hooker? It's an awful thing to be a teacher. If you're absent the day you should be in—it's awful. The trouble you do be getting in! I was lucky getting away the time I did, so I was. Now if to-morrow would be rough, with the wind shifting round, and a storm to be blowing, wouldn't it be terrible for me to be beyond, and nobody in charge of the school, and the manager to be surely hearing of it? I had to be getting back; I had. I was afraid."

In no part of his mind, as he spoke, did the vaguest doubt exist but that this was indeed the veritable cause of his return. Everything henceforward, for him now, in perfect sincerity dated from this invented cause.

Seeing there was not the least doubt in his own mind, as the most deeply concerned, it was a pity the women he addressed did not share his conviction. Such inventions, however, generations of men had humbly offered generations of women in a variety of matters, and they assumed, as by inbred instinct, the manner of appearing to be convinced while holding themselves intact and uncommitted. It was a courtesy based, as courtesy is, on greater strength. Nancy, however, being young, was prompted to sport. All the wonder of inexperience was before her, together with mystifying hints as of recollected experience.

"Did you not enjoy the Christmas?" she asked.

"I did. I did, then."

"If a person could get out of this place, where the sea does be all times roaring, and the rain in it always, he'd do well to go marching till he'd come to some place where there'd be ease to him."

"This is a beautiful place," replied James Burke rapturously. "I love it. There's no place I'd rather be in than this place, though one time I had a great notion to go wandering."

Maurya watched, not knowing whether to be puzzled most at the enigma of her daughter or at this man's ingenuousness, but determined, whatever puzzles might meet her straight gaze, to watch carefully. She was knitting at some stuff, and as her hands went automatically at her work she heeded the two of them warily without diminution of her stolid dignity.

Nancy soon seemed tired, but nothing seemed to exhaust James Burke's eagerness now that he had her in conversation.

"Were you ever in the city of Dublin?" he asked.

"I never was," she said shortly.

"'Tis a great place. 'Tis a beautiful place. You'd be destroyed dodging all the people in the streets. Do you know, I'd rather be in a hooker across the bay than to go crossing the streets, there's that weight of carts travelling. I do have to be going there for examinations odd times; and I do get a headache. It's that missed me the last time. I

didn't pass; I didn't; I didn't pass." He seemed greatly delighted at the thought, and laughed merrily, with his dark eyes full and round, at the imagined discomfiture of his examiners that he should fail. "I'll have to be going again now."

"Herself would never let me go to the harvest, else I'd have been. And alone, too, so I would."

"I'd like to be taking you, so I would. I would. I'd take you myself. It'd be wonderful so."

Even Nancy laughed merrily at the thought, and they made great gaiety out of the adventures they would have. So that when Maurya slung off the pot of potatoes for supper, and he had to go, he went back through the moonlight in great happiness, nursing his memory, and determined to have no reserves with Tadhg Quilter that night.

CHAPTER XII.

EOGHAN had resolved to build a new house. True, the old cabin was a continual poignancy, since it was to him but the disshambled frame out of which the speaking feature had been plucked. Yet the driving motive was not his pain. That could be endured. It was clear, vividly clear, to his mind now that he would not be able to journey on a suit to Maurya Flaherty till a new house was built, a-building, or so far projected as to be inevitable. It was clear not only as regards Maurya; it was the forcible impression left on his mind after his talk with Nancy.

He had spent Christmas Day roving the hills thinking this thing out. He had seen Nancy at Mass, but she had not seen him; and he came out before the Rosary, made his way across *Scráig Mór*, and, entering the hills there, kept moving upon them till dusk. The weather was fine and sunny, with the wind in the north-east. The sea lay calm and restful on both sides of the island, just faintly lapping on strand or against rock. It conveyed a sense of infinite peace, hardly swaying, grey-green toning in the distance to grey-blue under a clear atmosphere; but over the mountains a faint blue mist clung like a pervading spirit that vested their nakedness and relieved their severity. Earth was not

only companionable but infinitely lovable that day, and Eoghan lay back upon the heather in the sun, with his hands clasped behind his head, rolling about with huddled shoulders just as though he were taking an enormous caress and revelling voluptuously in it

He sought out his sheep, examining those he should take into the fair before the New Year. If building was to be done it would be necessary that he should realise some money; and no small portion of his increasing satisfaction throughout the day was the realisation that he was not quite the poor man he had always been in the habit of reckoning himself. It came on him with rather a bewildering surprise. His fine sense of animals, grown from an unrealised touch with the community of living things, and the careful herding for many years that his isolation fostered, had resulted in a greater prosperity than he would have credited as possible. He had a little difficulty in adjusting himself to this new range of ideas; and as a consequence he over-estimated their value.

Failing to find Nancy, and learning by chance that she and her mother had gone to Coisabhaun, he took it as a token that he was not to see her until he was in a position to speak with her after the fair. That was the fatalism of the man. He kept his mind, then, hard upon his present determination.

The hooker that had borne James Burke back to Maolan bore Eoghan and his cattle to the mainland. The hard weather had not yet come, but it was bitterly cold, and he sat up near the bow of the vessel, an isolated figure, watching the severe mountains of the coast fade into the mist that hung about the day.

It was a brisk fair. Not one of the herdsmen but had his fill of porter early in the day. Only the vendors of pigs and pigeons still discussed angrily in the crowded streets of the town as the early evening drew to a close, and then turned about to drive their noisy commodity back slushy roads.

Eoghan could drive a very hard bargain. Moreover, finding that business was brisk, he made no attempt to sell till he found how prices were going. It gave him pleasure to try and weigh the spirit of buyers against the market offered; it was a question of sensing the intangible agencies flowing about the tumultuous scene; and, obeying what he felt to be the spirit of the day, he was a hard seller, with the result

that he participated in the pressure towards the close of the day, and stood a considerable gainer over those who had sold early. The evening was done when he set back against the outgoing stream through the town. One or two inland sellers with him were elated at the last two hours' rise; but he was not so moved. For him the matter was closed with the pleasure it gave; and he was now estimating in terms of the house to be built.

The town was full of men. The bars were full to overflowing, but the man who had purchased the last of Eoghan's stock led him in by the private entrance of the hotel at which he was staying and asked him what he would have. He was a prosperous dealer from Mullingar, and Eoghan had particularly enjoyed his bargaining.

"Ned Brennan can produce a damned good whiskey, mind you, if you know he has it handy. Any water in yours, Mr. O'Clery?"

"I'll be taking mine red-raw," said Eoghan.

They sat opposite one another, Mr. Joseph Byrne, a comfortable, well-groomed man for all his fair-kit, lolling in an easy arm-chair, and Eoghan sitting straight as an arrow in a hard chair, forbidding and fierce of dignity. The two of them would have made a remarkable contrast on any other than a fair day. Mr. Byrne was a man who did not seem to be more than some thirty-five years, with stout, well-fed body, and a purplish glow on his cheeks. His calculating eye was slowly taking stock of Eoghan, who, by contrast, seemed like an ice-cold steel, with a strange delicacy about his countenance, and with a hint of passion waiting to burst. Eoghan made no attempt to engage in conversation, and seemed like a man whose thoughts were far afield—which, indeed, was true—and Mr. Byrne seemed anxious to open conversation. Men, sober and otherwise, were streaming to and fro; and the sounds of loud voices came in a confused roar from the adjoining room.

"I never had better mountainy sheep. These fairs are a great trouble to me. I'm all my days travelling, and its many a good fair I miss the other end of the country coming to the western parts. I'd give much to have someone watching some Connacht fairs for me. But it's hard to get a man whose opinion you'd take like your own—"

"'Tis the trouble of the world all times to be finding any-one you'd weigh with yourself in a traffic you've a mind

for," said Eoghan suddenly, although he had not seemed to be listening.

"That's right enough. And if you find any such man—well, he uses his wit against you, and that's worse."

"Surely."

"I suppose you have no mind for such a thing. It would be worth trying, and might be better work than being stuck to Maolan all your days."

"I have no such mind."

"Well, any time you have, Mullingar will always find me. And now let's get the bottle that whiskey came from."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE north-easterly gale that had been maturing arose during the night. A shrieking wind cried through the town, laden with small frozen snow; and no hooker the following day would venture into the bay. Indeed, Eoghan alone of all the herdsmen from the various islands went down to the harbour on the chance of discovering a more than ordinarily venturesome captain.

He was fretted with impatience. Under the cold exterior others saw, his whole being arose in an impassioned unreasoning protest; and he was hard-set to hold himself in leash. It was more than merely his wish to be back on Maolan; more than his anxiety to know how his cattle were faring under a hireling's care; more, even, than the fierce passion of his desire to be back speaking with Nancy, for whom, at bottom, this journey had been made, and the fruit of which he wished to bring back to her in good tidings. Coming as it did, just when the course was complete that he had set himself before he should see her, and make known to her the resolve he had taken at all costs now to have done with obstructions and indecision, it fell on his mind unreasonably like some uncanny symbol. His fatalism, his general feeling of insecurity in life, his apprehensiveness for a sinister twist in things such as had made him the isolated figure he was, all arose in one and argued malignly with him. His fortitude was broken as he strode about the harbour or on the mountains overlooking the harbour—a strange, wild

figure, as tempestuous and disorderly as the keen north-east wind that blew.

Nor had the storm in him calmed when the following day the journey was made. It was a cold sun-lit day. All the mountains round about the bay shone with beauty in their capes of snow. It was an astonishingly beautiful sight; and Maolan could be seen shining in the distance, on the skyline between blue waters and blue heavens like a gleaming jewel. Eoghan stood in the bows, breathing the beauty rarely; but there were stricken depths in him from his unassignable anguish of the previous day.

"Is that Maolan itself beyond?" a voice asked him by his side.

He turned to see a short, sturdy figure by his side, with a shock of black hair and beard, stumpy nose, square head, and so set upon its legs that it was as though its owner was used to bearing heavy weights upon his thighs and challenged any attempt to topple or upset him.

"It is," Eoghan answered.

"Maybe you're a native to it yourself?"

"Likely I am."

"You'll be going there now, maybe?"

"Very apt."

"I've a brother in that place is a schoolmaster. I'm from Roscommon way. My name's Sean Burke."

"I mind hearing of him. He's after getting his school there."

"Is it a good place for schoolmasters? I've a reason to be asking."

"I know one who did always say that schoolmasters of the modern times do only flitter the mind with decayed knowledge, and with the depositings of learning after the nobility was stripped away from it. All times himself did be saying that thing, and he living. There's little I heed now from the time I was benched myself."

The newcomer looked up at Eoghan queerly, and was silent for a time.

"I was meaning, would it be a good place for a schoolmaster to be getting married?"

"There's the begetting of children in that place the same as in any other I've a mind of."

Sean Burke gave a short, sudden laugh.

"I've a drove of them myself," said he. "We were

always marrying early; and that's a token for saying we were marrying foolishly. My brother has the notion now; and he'll have his head. Myself was the same way. The man that marries early marries for his fancy, and will be breeding heavy. There's some think it good, and many think it bad; but it's set that way for those with the disposition. What Seumas wants with me in it I cannot tell you now. He has a letter sent to me to go to him; and I'm going; but what the hell is the use of me but to be gain-saying, and if a colt's hot there's no way to be taming him but to let him run and sweat. It's a foolish custom that won't be letting a lone man be making his own match. Didn't I make my own for a pattern to Seumas?"

None of this seemed to Eoghan as though it demanded any response; and he was not of a mind to initiate conversation; so the two of them stood together watching their destination as the hooker heaved forward through the water on a three-quarter wind abaft. Standing quietly so, a friendliness passed between the two. Eoghan drew out his pipe, and found that it was broken; whereupon Sean Burke passed him his own he was smoking, and Eoghan pulled at that with a growing sense of peacefulness.

When they landed at Port among the rocks, Sean Burke accompanied Eoghan on the path over the mountains instead of taking a car round the road. They were still in silent mood, the interchanges between them being of the briefest; but soon Sean Burke's silence became less a dignity than a necessity, for it was an effort to maintain the pace Eoghan was giving him.

"Begob, man, but you're the great walker," he said admiringly, when they stood where the paths crossed.

"'Tis the use of the hills only. Coisabhaun's below you now, and the slaty roof is the schoolhouse. You'll be apt to make it before the scholars are breaking, so you will, though they'll be hard-set but they'll cut the size of a half-hour out of the end of the day."

"I'm thinking, by this token, you do have a queer shift to be raising cattle on them hills," said Sean Burke, looking round at the gaunt, stern country and dark mountains.

"'Tis a poor place only," Eoghan replied moving away. "God speed your work!"

He knew that Nancy should be driving the cows on the heath above Islean at this time, and he was anxious to find

her before she returned home. It was for this reason he had come at such a pace over the mountains, though Sean Burke's distress was obvious in the half-trot he kept. And so he sped away now with the same intentness, leaving Sean Burke gazing after him, a square-set, slightly bowed wondering figure betwixt the village below and the hill behind him.

"I give the best to that fellow," said he. "He has me near killed." And laughing his short, sudden laugh, he went slowly down the path with his hard hat tipped to the back of his head.

But Eoghan kept swiftly on. He went over the fields north of Islean, intending to strike across the direction of Nancy's return and the cottage.

As he had expected, Nancy was coming down the further hill, lazily driving her cows before her. Her crimson blouse at once caught his eye, a dull spot of colour against the brown weather-torn heather; and he became rigid with an unaccountable anxiety as he watched her cross the intervening bog, leaping from hummock to hummock. His hand went to the place where his sales-money stuck in a lump against his body. It was safe enough. All things were as he had conceived of them and arranged for them; yet his apprehension remained, like the skirts of a storm telling of trouble elsewhere; and he was unable to advance across the bog to meet her.

Nor did she seem at all too pleased to see him. She turned on him as though she were afraid of him, when he at last sprang forward towards her.

"God bless and guard you, Nancy," he greeted her; "but I'm hungry seeing you again, I am."

"Is it yourself, Eoghan?" she said defensively. "What kept you this long time away?" She guarded herself against him, and reproached him thus; yet seeing him again blotted out the memory of her days' fear of him. He haunted her, as of old. The impact of his intentness carried him, as it were, into her mind, and beat down the barrier she had been building there against him.

"I've been at great work," he began eagerly; and then, not feeling sure of the ground on which he went, he lapsed into defensive dignity: "I'm for building."

Nancy did not know what to make of this. After her besetting thought of the past days there was misgiving in her. Yet always when he stood so in that attitude of cold,

remote dignity he held the mastery of her; and so she fenced with him.

"What way would you be building? Haven't you the house beyond?" she asked; and she laid her hand upon his arm, inviting the caress he had not given.

"'Tis no place to be bringing yourself," he said warmly, lifting her hand and letting his arm pass about her. They had not as yet kissed. Each time they met they won towards this slowly. "'Tis a poor scattered place, and liker a memory for him that's gone than a house to be bringing you and the heartfelt of love I have for you."

Each time he spoke in that tone he thrilled her. She leant against him content to be played on as an instrument. In that mood the thing remained remote. It was romancing, and romancing was curious and delightful. She shivered as she leant against him, thrilled by him; and his love for her became a flame that devoured him.

"It'll be hard building so," she said, "with the hardship that's on you." She came as near then, in her own way, to a union of thought with him as was possible with her. A union of emotion the fire caught from him had often compelled.

"Not too hard in the end. I was evermore thinking I was stricken poor; and devil the one is in this place that has any money attached to them but the shopkeepers only and them that have letters coming an odd time from America. It's a strange way, so it is; and himself was always speaking of the traffic and riches residing in the country in the olden times. But it's not so set I am at all," he said proudly. "There's other ways I haven't but a notion of; for I'm after coming from the fair now, and there's a purse of gold on me will be building a house not too small itself, and more to it. There's more roads a person might be taking than but the one, my lovely; but there's a path under my two feet now, I'm sure. It was a good fair surely," he added in her silence; "but the sheep was the best in reckoning. We'll rally round the times, Nancy, so we will."

Still she was silent. She wished to be standing in fields of romance, whereas the quiet elation in his tone came from the fact that he had felt a path under his two feet. And the two things did not agree.

"Are you flinching, Nancy?" he cried out in a sudden apprehension,

"I'm not, then. What way would I be? Don't be saying that of me," she said; and lied; for she was startled. Her mother and Eoghan seemed to be in league; and she drew back as at a cliff-edge at her feet. But that was not to say she would let it be said of her to her face that she was flinching.

"I thought likely you were," he defended himself humbly, "and I after the great happiness on me. A person wouldn't be too ready trusting his luck, a person wouldn't. There's the queer end of a rope that's evermore putting him on the ungainly road he'd be fearing. Don't be minding me, Nancy. There's times in the black night I could be coming to you to carry you with me set and certain, there's that trouble on me. And it's surely true there'd be a great curse on you if you fell from me. Ah, but you won't, surely. I've my two hands put to you; and the big plan made; and there's times and great times coming in the mercy of God."

"Why should you be troubling yourself? Don't be misgiving. You're a strange troublesome man, and you do well to let yourself rest easy, mind now. Tell me do, where will you be building the new house?" She was genuinely touched by the very intangibility of his trouble; and she put her arms about him with a sudden wild tenderness, as she might have done about a child that had taken her fancy.

The unusualness of her sudden demonstration chimed in with his unrest, and made it hard for him to rest easy as she had bade him do.

"Beyond the house that's now in it," said he, with but a hint of the joy with which he had chosen the site; "and the place for the cows will be equal handy so. 'Tis a dry place, and set quiet and easy to itself for the two of ourselves only. I'll have the sod cut this very next day, so I will; and couldn't I be coming to herself after?"

"She's hard and ungainly now; and troth, she'll be giving me words waiting and drifting after the cattle." She led the way back towards the cottage, and he followed by her side.

"If she does be always so then an odd time should be as good as any other," he pleaded.

But Nancy wished to have time to think; which, with her, meant the opportunity to withdraw if such could be done. Any sort of deliberation was the prelude to further indecision.

"Let you rest till I have her sounded," she said sharply. Then, as she caught a storm of trouble in him that would

have detained her further, she added: "A body cannot always be flattered by her notions."

His protest was arrested. He walked with her, not knowing how things now lay.

"Will you speak to her this night that's in it?" he asked.

"I will now, surely."

"This very night that is?"

"Didn't I say it?"

"May the blessing of God be on you, Nancy; you've put the great rest to me so, so you have," he said, not knowing, nevertheless, whether to be wildly glad or greatly uneasy, the two things struggling equally in him.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAURYA watched Nancy cautiously that evening. She could not tell what it was made the girl so docile and so anxious. Nancy sat almost nervously opposite her mother, sewing at some work; and it often seemed as though she were about to seek her confidence; but she always branched away just when Maurya expected her to speak. She might, indeed, have spoken, despite the strangeness of such a confidence, but that she was just as aware of her mother's watchfulness as her mother was of her unrest. She resented it. After some hours of this tacit interchange she would have gone out gladly with Eoghan then and there had he come in and claimed her. In truth, though Eoghan knew nothing of this, had he but come to her at any time and roughly swept her out to go wandering the roads with him in some tinker's life he would never have found any trouble with her, so fretful was she with the watch and ward of her life, in and out of the house. This was most deeply felt now; and it was with a defiant shake of her head that she determined to keep her own confidence.

Moreover, Maurya was not only watchful, but anxious. She did not know how her challenge had been taken, beyond its initial success. She had heard that Eoghan had gone to the fair with what seemed to her an incredible weight of cattle, and she wondered what this meant. No curlew had called since the Christmas Day; and she knew no other time when Nancy and Eoghan might have met. The men re-

turning from the fair had passed the house that day; and she had not seen Eoghan among them. Likely he would be coming that night. Was it for this the girl was restless? Besides, Tadhg had been vaguely mysterious; and she had been expecting him each night now that the New Year was on them.

Altogether she was puzzled, but not unruffled; nothing marred her dignity and strength. Sitting forward on her stool, with her elbows on her knees and her shoulders square, knitting, she was like a tower of self-reliance. Though the sharp words of reproof were on her lips she made no attempt to check Nancy, who was, in her curious restlessness, continually picking up the live sods of the fire with the tongs and moving them to and fro.

It was a bitter night. The north-easterly gale was arising, and the snow was steadily creeping down the sides of the mountains upon the lower heaths, until the whole countryside began to shine with a peculiar glow through the dark night. The Flaherty's house was sheltered against the hill; but the wind came furling over the crest and rushed down the hillside upon it so that the house was full of turf-reek. Yet it was not too rough; and thus the bitter cold had time to lay its grasp on heath and house. There was no terror in the night; only extreme rigour; and it was a rigour that made its presence felt everywhere. Many a hare limped with frozen limbs down from the hills. The wild geese and curlew, scenting the rigour from afar, had already gone from the heaths and hills to the rocks along the ocean-edge; but they now were querulous with the cold wherever they had shrouded themselves. And even golden plover and woodcock, in companies or singly, began to flutter away through the night down to the lower lands. Earth was stiffening and hardening. Many a bird would pluck futilely at her bosom the following day, finding it hard as rock. She, the creator of life, and its suckler, was showing now how she could kill, select, harden and discipline. She who fed and fostered, gave no heed now either to stiffening limbs or whimpering complaint. Her infinite cruelty became like her infinite tenderness, an influence while on her way to a further goal. She killed as she created, making the one deed an immolation as the other was a gift offering, while a larger purpose shone like a crown above the seeming medley of her fortunes. And always she was beautiful;

divinely, not malignly, so. She justified herself by the perfect justification, beyond all schemes of intellect: divine beauty. Even the hare, limping pitifully, all its great speed gone, could not mar the extraordinary beauty of the night as the great hills and the flowing heaths began to reveal themselves in capes of snow through the pale light that filtered down through the clouds that swept the sky. The light increased and faded again, and the bosom of Earth shone whitely nearer or receded into darkness, while the whips of small snow streamed through the night. It was like a scene in elf-land, delicate and rare; but it put forth a hand whose rigour chilled the blood. Small wonder had Nancy fretted at the fire. But Maurya knew it was not the cold, but a deeper trouble, that caused her petulant restlessness. And though she knew this she said no word, for she resolved to watch.

Yet when at a later hour than usual, and when Maurya had begun to wonder, Nancy with unnecessary defiance bade good-night, Maurya was puzzled. She remained astir some time after her daughter, slowly knitting and as slowly thinking; and, strange experience for her, she lay awake thinking, wondering what was pending.

She was still awake when she heard the noise of several footsteps come stumbling up the *boithirin* towards the cottage. It was well after midnight; and she lay listening intently as the voices—men's voices—approached the door. Then, as she thought she recognised one of the voices, a sudden thought struck her, and she sprang abroad, dressing rapidly. As she did so a knocking fell upon the door.

“Who's that in it?” she called.

She heard Tadhg speaking outside; but it was not to her he was speaking; so she put her ear close to the door, and she heard enough to tell her her surmise was just. For the first time for many years something like excitement, very like perturbation, seized her blood. She had been purely hasteful before; but she was uncertain and excited now. Her thoughts at once went to Nancy, whom she heard stirring in the room beyond; and she lost the cool, striking action her mind habitually achieved.

“It's myself, Mrs. Flaherty,” she heard James Burke say. “Myself and my brother are here, and we've come on a little business.”

“What is it itself?” she heard Nancy asking from the

room beyond; but she gave no heed to her. She unloosened the latch and undid the door.

A dim snow-clad world lay before her in a temporary lull; and three figures white with snow stood in a knot together before the doorway.

"Come in now out of the night: don't be standing there," she said, shivering slightly at the cold that struck upon her. "It's cold now, so it is," she said, shutting the door.

Tadhg Quilter, Sean and James Burke stood in the house; and Tadhg took a bottle of whiskey out of his pocket and quietly placed it on the table as a graceful intimation what the business was on which they had come.

James Burke went, with his curiously quick little steps, over to the hearth, and stood as though warming himself there, with his back to the others, although it was heaped with ashes and showed neither flame nor red ember.

"I'll be rousing it now," said Maurya, quickly raking away the ashes, and piling turf about the live sods. She was recovering dignity now, and a little of her calm, though she was still perturbed, her mind in the flurry into which it had been so suddenly stirred.

She was not the only person in that mood of troubled excitement. As she stirred at the fire, and relieved her agitation by bodily speed, Nancy came to the door of her room and stood for a moment looking at them all. Not one of them saw her, for their attention was toward Maurya. The picture she saw—the three men standing in their places with the snow melting on their coats, Maurya arousing a welcome for them at that hour of the night, the bottle of whiskey standing in anticipation on the table—meant only one thing: a *cleamhnas* party. It was as though she, walking fearing little, had violently been faced by a cliff of reality. Even the threatening of some such thing vaguely for the future, earlier in that day, was nothing to this thing, set hard and business-like before her, with just the faintly menacing hint of a capture-party that survived in the old custom.

She went back into the room wringing her hands. "Maise, but I don't want it; and I won't; so I won't!" she whispered to herself, walking lightly to and fro in the half-light coming from the other room. Neither Eoghan nor James Burke were even remotely in her mind. She did not think of the persons comprising the present menace. It was

purely the menace, as a menace, that affrighted her; and, even as it affrighted, hypnotised her. There was just the thrill of a new experience after the introductory shock. She would not mind the experience if she could withstand the menace; but the other room held four people leagued against her; and whoever was borne on that impending wave mattered little beside the wave that bore him. It was the wave that threatened; therefore it was of the wave she thought; and not for an instant did she think so far of persons as to question her preferences and choices, of men or the circumstances they offered.

"Be bringing yourselves handy," said Maurya, having the fire towards a flame. "You're welcome to this place."

At that signal Sean Burke went determinedly to the seat opposite, and without further ado struck into the business transaction as representing the party he proposed.

"God bless you, woman of the house," he said, "and spare you the long life! My name's Sean Burke; I'm from Roscommon county."

"God bless you kindly, and spare you the health. You're heartily welcome to this place."

And she put her hand to him, which he shook in friendship.

"I've come with this young lad, my brother that is. I'm all the kindred attached to him, or we'd be a stouter company, ma'am, coming to this house." So he apologised for the grave indignity of a small party coming to a *cleamhnas*.

"You are a small company, surely," said Maurya with non-committal dignity. The fact, however, that Sean Burke had come all the way from Roscommon helped to atone for the shortcoming, as Tadhg Quilter had known it would.

"Troth, so we are. It's myself that feels it. But there cannot be more in it than they are."

"Certainly so."

"It's a wild part of the country, ma'am. I was never in it before."

"It is now. 'Tis a poor sort of a place; and the earth only creeping between the rocks and the stones. It's hard set a person would be, living in this place, with no one to put a hand to helping a body an odd time. Bogs and stones only, fit for cattle that's hardy and thrifty living and a poor sort of meat to be eating. That's just how it is now. A person does have to bore and tear the meat in the eating,

the little we'd be getting. And the spuds do be often perished and rotten, with the salt that does come drooking the fields itself. Little's the money ever passes in this place. Do you think will we ever rally round the times?"

"I believe it would be the rough place surely."

"But we're the hardy people, thanks be to God! If the place is poor itself the people is good. There's not the house but is flowing with childer, though they do be drifting to America itself at their time. Well, it's the will of God."

James was frowning and blushing, fidgetting and attempting painfully to catch his brother's eye, while these two expert dealers were manœuvring for position; but Sean gave no sign that he noticed him. Nor for that matter did Maurya; yet she missed no movement of his; and she strengthened herself by his obvious eagerness.

"Children are the blessing," Sean went on. As he sat, looking at the hearth, with his square taut body poised easily on his chair, he seemed to be following the conversational bends and twists with not a thought to anything beyond; but his brain was shrewdly alert, his apprehension was keen, and he was careful that his manner should not be too assumedly negligent. He had always the air of being ready simply and naturally to bid good-night and go his way at any instant's notice. "I've a great weight of children myself, ma'am. We were always the fortunate begetters. Herself will always have another to step to my place at the work if my time came ungainly."

"Will you talking so? That God may spare you the long life indeed."

"God is good. We were always healthy, thanks be to Him. The lad there never had a day's illness in his life. It was the same way with myself."

Being so suddenly indicated, James's eyes went round and wide, and he looked troubled now at the thought that the conversation was beginning to circle above him. Tadhg Quilter, on his part, was quickly watchful, keen for the moment when his entry should be signalled.

"Is that so? If a body had all the weight of riches of the big world attached to him, or the house of a great king, and hadn't the health, it would be a poor thing only, so it would. We were always middling ourselves, thanks be to the Almighty God."

"Troth, the health's a great commodity. Him that's

without the health would be giving all his goods to be taking a sup of it a stray time. And good stock does be breeding healthy—healthy and heavy, ma'am. It's a tight house you have for the cold night, though it's small itself." And he drew himself nearer the hearth to give conversational point to his remark.

"I did often think one time to be stretching it. But 'tis large enough the way it is, and only the two bidding in it. A door could be loosed behind yourself, where the stones are rough to rise walls attached to them."

"So they are," said Tadhg. "I mind that now."

"Himself had the notion to be stretching it. He only had this house lifted the year God put a time to him."

"That is so," said Tadhg. "God rest his soul!"

"Amen! It would take money to be adding to it," Sean said contemplatively.

"That's how we left it the way it is," Maurya said, wary now, and withdrawing again.

"There's a great room could be put to that," Tadhg said, "and the time Nancy thought to be marrying, it would make a comfortable rest, and great company for herself."

"It could be," said Sean. "If that lad came marrying what might be the money you'd give to the match, ma'am?" And he scratched his beard reckoningly.

"That's a hard question to be putting to the woman," said Tadhg. "Where would she be getting any money? But with Patsy that's in America, and myself, helping her, there's no doubt she could raise twenty-five pounds to a match. Twenty-five pounds is a heavy weight of money, and I wouldn't be consenting but for the liking I have for Seumas, and he in a good way of scholarship."

"That's true enough, Mr. Quilter; true enough, indeed. He always had the learning. He'll not always be teaching in this one place, but going to towns and cities, and in the end taking an inspectorship with a good house attached to him. That's how it'll be, sure enough."

Like a barb Sean's words struck Nancy where she was standing behind the partition listening troublously to every word. It was the only thing that offered her a relief; and Tadhg, quick-wittedly on the instant, saw what it offered.

"It might well be, Mr. Burke. I'm not saying it wouldn't. I'm not saying any girl on this island wouldn't think of that; and I'm not saying either there wouldn't be

enviousness coming toward her." None would have thought that the loudness of his tone was any more than the natural emphasis of his argument. "But it's with himself where he does be these times we're thinking of. There's speculating, and there's speculating. A person does always have great hopes the time he'll have a likely foal, I reckon; and that's speculating more than enough; but it's a foal's price he pays, and not a grown horse's altogether. Isn't that right now?"

"That's so. There's sense to that. But twenty-five pounds is short; a lot short; and I cannot be a party to it."

"It's a big weight of gold; and there's not a single shilling more any man could raise."

"It's not enough." Sean opposed Tadhg's expostulation imperturbably and decisively, still with the air of one who would calmly rise up and take 'is departure. "Not by the hell of a long way. Many's the girl I could find for him in my own country at a hundred pounds, with a farm and all at the end!"

"A hundred pounds? Man dear, where do you think a woman like herself would ever see the like of that money? You're marketing now!"

"Don't say that of me now. A hundred pounds by the end of two years, baby or no baby; and the marriage dues overwithal."

The sharp finality with which Sean made his statement threw a silence over the whole company. James anxiously sought to draw his brother's attention, who was calmly oblivious of all. Tadhg was moved to respect of Sean; and Maurya, becoming suspicious of Tadhg's capable handling, prepared to resume the lead for herself. Whereas Nancy, the subject of the bargaining, in her agitation was having all strength of will and cleanness of desire drawn out of her where she waited in suspense on every word. Had the actual bargaining begun early, no doubt she would have broken in energetically enough, but she began to feel more and more like flotsam that was soon to become jetsam. Power oozed out of her. Personality seemed to be passing from her. Yet a ghastly sick fascination held her in suspense.

"I don't mind," said Tadhg, addressing Maurya, "helping you more yet. I'll add another five pounds; by the token of that I'll add ten pounds, so I will. That's how it is now; and you to pay the marriage dues," he added to Sean Burke.

“ I’ll pay no marriage dues.”

“ Then, by gob, I will; and there you are ! ” And Tadhg leant back triumphantly.

“ What’s that about ? ” Sean asked, looking up at him sharply.

“ How’s it now ? ”

“ It’s the way it was before you made a flaming splendour of yourself with five pounds or with ten pounds, and not a bit the better or worse. Let you heed that now.”

“ You’re chaffering. Is it merchandise you think the girl is ? ” Tadhg asked, leaning forward flushed with anger.

“ Goods, is it ? By gob, a man would do well to be quit of you.”

“ That’s a thing easily answered,” said Sean, gathering himself together, and looking about for his hat. “ ’Tis no great thing to be in this place, or to come travelling the long road to it.”

James was white, the blue eyes glooming darkly against his cheeks, heavy with tears, his face weighty with tragedy. He sat there hopelessly, inertly, without energy of speech or action, while his brother drew on his coat and took up hat and staff, content to show his anger in emphatic action.

Nancy, behind the partition, was taken up on a wave out of the trough in which she had been washed inertly before, and on its crest felt a sudden vertigo seize her. She could have married James Burke then and there, if only in sheer joy at having escaped the terrible bargaining that had washed her to and fro till it had deadened her will. But she was thrown again into the trough relentlessly, for she heard Tadhg Quilter rise up quickly and seize Sean Burke.

“ Wait yet. Rest easy, man ; rest easy. You’re a hasty man, and I’m over-hasty myself. God help me.”

Sean sat down again, with his hat held over his knee. A heavy silence settled in the room, broken only by the roar of the wind in the chimney and the faint still sound of the burning turf. Maurya was the first to break it by drawing forward the red sods and piling new turf behind them.

“ It’s the way it is,” Tadhg said with an air of great frankness : “ Herself and myself were speaking an odd time of the girl. Patsy—that’s the girl’s brother mind you ; he’s in America with ten years—Patsy said he’d help, so he would, though he’d been misfortunate in his business. He’s

giving twenty-five pounds, do you see? There's many a handy fellow would be glad to marry a fine, beautiful girl, and she with twenty-five pounds coming to her. Twenty-five pounds is a great weight of money that takes the hell of a lot of scraping, in America or in any other place. Mind that now. Nevertheless, Seumas here, when he came to me saying he was heart-stricken, he had my fancy then. Says he: 'I love her,' says he; 'and I'm heart-broke from this time out,' says he, 'if I cannot hold her in my arms in the way of marriage.' Says he: 'I'll take her to the big cities of the world, and there'll be great travelling and making of love,' says he; 'I'll heed every wish she'd be putting to me like the sun would be putting health on the lifting flowers,' says he. 'Tis what he came saying to me. And says I to this fellow: 'Tis you that won't fail from your happiness if I have to put my hand to the transaction myself,' says I. Wasn't I saying that now?"

"So you did, God bless you," said James brokenly.

"Mind you, what I said I'll do. I'm that sort of a man. I was all times a man of my word. Wasn't I so?" he appealed to Maurya.

"So you were, Tadhg Quilter."

"I said I'd give ten pounds: I'll give fifteen pounds, every bit of it, and pay the dues myself, so I will."

"What's that now?"

"Forty pounds it is—with the first baby. That's great money now, I reckon," he added, as he saw Sean Burke looking at him in contempt.

Sean continued looking so for a time.

"May God spare you the long life and give you the health?" said he. "You're a fine man, Mr. Quilter, and there's great mouthfuls of speech dropping out of your lips; but I think you're taking me for the hell of a likely fool. Come out of this place, Seumas," he said, waving his hat at the company. "I think we'll be making tracks."

"You wouldn't have the lad's heart broken, would you?" Tadhg appealed, pointing to James where he stood with a tempest of grief and tears hid, as it were, in his face, ready to burst. "Can't you see the way he's stricken? Is there no heart at you, man?"

"Come out, now, Seumas," Sean said again, waiting for him.

"I won't, I won't," said James, bursting into tears. "I'll

take her the way she is. I'm heart-broke for her, and she all that beautiful and she is. Where is she herself? Where is she? Oh, where is she? Cannot you tell me? I'm ruined with the longing. It has me destroyed, amn't I telling you? "

He was interrupted by an admonishing blow on the ribs from his brother that made him gasp with pain.

"You're content so?" Sean asked him.

"I am. I am surely. You didn't see her yet: she's the wonder of my eyes: where is she? "

"And you're in contentment to have him so?" Sean asked, turning to Maurya and Tadhg.

"He's a good lad; he's a good lad," Tadhg said quietly.

"Then I'll be making my tracks myself," Sean said, turning to the door. "Good-night to ye all! You have the lad rarely trapped. You have him tricked and trapped; and there'll be great gaming in the neighbours at your sharpness and your cunning. But I'll put no match to it. You cannot be shaming me, for I'll shame you first. Good-night to ye!"

"Hold a bit, man; hold a bit," Tadhg said, jumping after him.

Sean turned by the door; and the company stood looking at one another—while Nancy sat on her bed within, sick and weary and foredone in mind and body.

"Come and sit down, now, and let us not be hasty."

Sean came up slowly, and sat again with his hat over his knee, ready for departure at any instant.

They sat for a long time so, to let the memory of tempest pass from the air. Then Tadhg spoke again.

"It's a great iniquity in the country to be treating marrying as goods. It's a great shame, Mr. Burke." He waited, angling for some committal words from Sean, who sat looking squarely at him without an emotion visible on his face. "Nancy must be getting a husband this year," he continued. "That's a sure thing, and herself will be wanting a man to the place. It'd be nice and handy the way it is: and I wouldn't be ruining it for any words of mine, so I wouldn't. What might you be thinking, ma'am?" he turned to Maurya.

Maurya had sat all this time with a growing contempt for men; with a deep fundamental contempt for these talking

ineffectual necessities to wage-earning that was becoming more and more clear to her own mind. She had always humoured Tadhg Quilter's opinion of his own smartness, for such humouring was part of the hereditary wisdom of her sex, inalienably drawn from the depositions of hoary experience; but this was not a time for such ancient courtesy. This was an occasion that needed direct handling.

"I'll give fifty pounds with the girl; and if you're not favouring that, mister, it's a poor thing that brought you coming this lengthy way."

Sean looked at Maurya Flaherty and saw dignity, finality and decision. He tried one more cast.

"And you to be paying the dues, ma'am?"

"I'll pay half of the dues, and you to pay the half of them."

Sean Burke sat quietly for a while, as if reckoning the matter out.

"Where's herself?" he asked.

"Nancy, will you come out?" Maurya said sharply, without moving, though with her words all the others rose, James Burke himself faint with eagerness.

"I won't come," said Nancy slowly and feebly. As she sat on her bed, not knowing what to think or do, inertia seemed to her the only possible defence. To surrender that was to fail. Her mind seemed incapable of counter-attack, her habitual mode of defence.

"Will you come out?" Maurya said again, and her tone was clearly one that was intended to assail an enfeebled resistance.

"I won't," said Nancy.

"She's shy," said Tadhg Quilter; "and what way wouldn't she be. Let you go in, lad, and bring her out," he said, pushing James towards the door of the room.

"Come out, and let you not be a wee fool," said Maurya, rising.

"Go in lad, and fetch her now," said Tadhg.

Nancy was feeling her will crumbling, feeling very apt for hysterical tears, when she found James running in upon her with a torrent of incoherent eloquence. She did not hear what it was he said, save that it dinned in upon her mind terribly. He was half-distressed and wildly glad, and she heard him repeat over and over again that she was "beautiful as the stars that do be twinkling in the sky"; and in

truth his boyishly impetuous affection for her, and concern for her, did not fail to wake chords in her that were pleasing to her sense; but deep in her the dominant emotion was in immense revulsion, not of him—he was half-babe, and not unpleasant—but of the clamour he represented. If only time could return a few hours to the deep slumbers of two lone women in the house! That was her burning thought, however little clearly it lay before her cognisance. Eoghan O'Clery himself, though he was nowhere present in any part of her memory, lay present in that burning thought, that was less a thought than a desire of the mind, an energy of the foiled being.

It was not until James Burke sat on the bed beside her, and threw his arms violently about her, and kissed her, that the chaos of her mind suddenly took shape. Those in the outer room heard a slap as of someone being struck with the open hand upon the cheek; and they saw Nancy come out with flushed face and bright eyes, looking amazedly beautiful, to confront them.

The first person she saw was her mother.

"It's settled so?" she asked.

"Troth, it is, and may God give you the happiness," Tadhg broke in.

"I've no mind to be marrying," said she, seeing that one thing with terrible clearness.

"'Tis hard to bring the mind to any sudden thing," Sean Burke said. "If your mind's that way, let you rest so."

She looked on this strange foursquare man with the curious edge of wavering kindness in his voice, and then to her mother, in whose strong face the alternatives were clearly indicated for her.

"'Tis one or 'tis another," she said, and as she said so the visual image of Eoghan came quite clearly before her eyes, his red hair and clear, bright skin against a dark night; and in some part of her being a dumb cry moaned; for the image signified a newly begotten emotion.

But James Burke was standing beside her, with a curious flush on his left cheek. There was a new note of determination about him. He put his arms deliberately, even with physical roughness, about her, and kissed her on the lips. She suffered him.

"Good lad! Good lad!" said Tadhg Quilter. "*Is maith thu*. It's the winning way." And he handed around the

glasses of whiskey he had poured out the instant Nancy had assented.

“ Now I'll go rouse the neighbours,” said he, clumsily pulling on his coat.

One by one the neighbours came in, sleepily for the most part, some completing their toilets. A keg of porter was produced mysteriously, and a melodion was found, with the result that the memory of sleep soon faded away, and day had waked a full two hours before the company dispersed.

For a while Nancy had sat on a bench, thinking her thoughts; hardly knowing that James Burke was sitting beside her in happy possession of her hand, all memory of the clap on his cheek faded away. Then she joined the dancers. She never danced with James Burke. He manœuvred persistently, but she avoided him always. Nor did she miss a dance. Nothing tired her. When the company dispersed she went into her room and slept.

Maurya did not disturb her, but went forth to turn out the cows herself. Such things were in a lifetime, and were no more to be questioned than the succession of fair and foul weather, or the changing face of Earth. Such things were a destiny to be endured: for to-morrow would be bad if to-day were good: and if to-day were bad to-morrow was apt to be good; very apt indeed. Love led to disappointment; and often disappointment led to love. And anyway there were the heath and the hills, and the cows that needed to be turned forth.

CHAPTER XV.

WITH the first streak of dawn, hours before the last of the dancers passed down the *boithirin* from Maurya Flaherty's cabin, Eoghan O'Clery turned up through the bog around his cottage towards the mountains. In the cold, grey light they sat white and strange in a circle above him. Though his mind was intent on other things; though he, in truth, through a lull of slumber, had held that intentness in temporary abeyance, yet he was arrested by that unwonted beauty. He halted, and spread his arms wide, breathing sharply, and keenly, with a wildness in his eyes as though the joy were too fine to bear, too keen, too ethereal to sustain. As the daylight throve so they brightened. The light in the valley did not

increase, save as it was reflected from these faintly shining ones who were slowly transfigured behind the mists. The morning was deathly still. The night's storm had died away, and not a wisp of wind crept over the heather. There was a faint edge of small snow over the hummocks of the bog, shining like a white uplifting of the swelling dark substance as the light flowed into the air. Mists hid the distance; and through them glowed the great beings, who were not so much unfamiliar in their new beauty as more mysteriously revealing. The clothing snow was not an advent but an opportunity for another unclothed beauty. The snow clothed no more than did the heather, than did the earth and rock; like them, it revealed what could not otherwise be revealed; but it lent the chance of revealing a rarer part of a multiform being.

The misty air slowly drank up the light, until it spread and lay over the face of the bog itself. In the air above, the light was flowing strongly, and the hills passed from their strange iridescent whiteness to the glow of daylight. Yet the sun had lifted its face southward over the cliffs above Coisabhaun before Eoghan went forward slowly over the bog, jumping from hummock to hummock carefully, watching the mountains always as he went.

He knew the very place where he intended to build; and he intended to cut the sod as soon after mid-day as he could return. So when he ran and leapt upon the hillside he hastened too in the care of his cattle.

It was with a strong resolved joy that he came swiftly over the fields from the hills and at once began measuring his space. There was no timidity or uncertainty about him now. His hand was laid upon a task to which he saw a clear and unfailing continuity, and his actions in consequence had a crisp decision about them that resolved all his other qualities into itself. He became his deed; living in his deed; and his deed dominated him completely.

So it was not long before he had his space marked out, and, bitter cold though it was, his coat was soon flung off as he dug out the enclosed space to the rock beneath.

As he worked he did not notice the great shoulders of Padraic McLir moving up the bank of the river. He noticed nothing until Padraic stood near him; and then he did not cease in his work while he informed him that it was a great day, and met the response that it was great surely. There-

fore he did not notice—indeed, he would probably not at any time have noticed—that Padraic seemed as though he were in a labour to deliver himself greater even than usual. They remained so without speech the better part of half an hour before Padraic spoke again; while Padraic watched Eoghan dig away the turf from the space he had outlined.

“Did you go back the road to-day?” he asked at last.

“I did not,” Eoghan replied, digging energetically.

“Was it until the cattle you went?” he asked again, after a further germinating period.

“I did so,” Eoghan said, not noticing the implication that Padraic had already searched for him.

“It wasn’t back the road you were then, surely,” came the weighty conclusion.

Padraic was in the midst of this thing, and utterly unable to define it to himself. Not only was it true that his awareness always followed upon his action, but in this particular case he was smothered by his enormous kindness. Here was an occasion where action depended on speech, and speech depended on a reasoning definition quite different from the other kind of definition with which his mind habitually presented him. Therefore he was in pangs of labour with his utterance; and would have been pathetically so but for the fact that he was completely oblivious of his own state or of any other than the thing to be done.

Thus another long spell of silence ensued while he dumbly watched Eoghan at his labour. Had Eoghan but looked up at him he could not have missed the fatiguing effort of the man, if only in the great, the enveloping, kindness of the brown eyes looking down at him; but he was closely occupied with his work. The tragedy of that work slowly, but all the more largely, crowded in upon Padraic’s mind, and stemmed all his efforts at utterance.

“You’ll be building, will you, so, in it?” he asked.

“I will now.”

“The other house was a bad place surely.”

“It wasn’t too bad for one that would be living lonesome.”

“Well, it wasn’t now.”

Another long silence ensued.

“You didn’t go until the village to-day?” he asked then.

“I did not.”

“You didn’t hear of the *cleamhnas*?”

"I did not. It's the time for marrying."

Another long, and for Padraic a stupendously difficult silence came on them. Nothing seemed to disengage Eoghan from this tragic work that hurt him to watch.

"They were saying it was Nancy herself, she that does live by Islean back the road."

Still Eoghan worked away, throwing the sods beyond the limits of his space as he cut them. Then as the sense of the words penetrated past the close occupancy of his mind, he lifted himself and looked on Padraic with fear and question in his eyes and the colour dying in his cheeks.

"They were saying that now," Padraic said slowly, with his eyes fixed on the eyes that faced them, though they were hurt by the anguish they saw there. His hand half went out in a dumb gesture of sympathy, but it fell to his side again.

"That's a bloody lie!" Eoghan cried, the spade falling from his hand, and anguish crying in his voice.

"It's what I was hearing. Tomas, it was, was telling me, now, and he went back the road in the morning. There's people will be talking, but Tomas it was that told me, and he back the road in the morning. He's the trusty teller, and he back with them that were coming from the *cleamhnas*. He should be the trusty teller, so he should, and he in the village itself speaking to me. That's how it was now."

A cry of infinite pain came from Eoghan, and he reeled where he stood, bent forward a little as he had raised himself from his work, looking on Padraic with pain-stricken eyes that shone brightly against his colourless cheeks.

"It's a bloody lie, it's a bloody lie," he said.

"Man dear," Padraic began, "it's what Tomas Michael is after telling me, and he back the road to hear the like of that. So it is now. That's how it is. It's he that was hearing it."

But Eoghan turned, and with the lashings of tears on his cheeks ran across the fields like a stricken thing. He scrambled over the mearing and ran wildly, still bent forward, towards the village.

Padraic took a step or two after him, and watched him till he disappeared beyond a far mearing. Then he went back home along the river shaking his head; and sat for long beside his fire, looking on it, seeking to resolve the great sympathy that possessed him into some intelligible action.

Had he waited he would have seen Eoghan come rushing back, still with his shoulders bent forward, look wildly round for him, and then rush back the way he had come.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was never possible to catch Tomas McLir unaware. There was no information told him but he knew it already. There was no intelligence procured him but he had canvassed its possibility. He would listen to his interlocutor with a watchful, pitying eye, as though wondering how there could be folk who were so late in the hour with information, even though they might have come hot-footed from the event. Meanwhile, he was wary to heed what was told, to judge what was not told, deftly to elicit what he could, and by no means to emerge from his cover until he could do so replete with a fuller seeming of information than his informant. But he never emerged from interrogation, hint and inference.

Thus, when young Patsy Bán found him at Barnaran and unloaded on to him the information that Michael O'Dochertaigh had just given him hot and tired from the dancing and flushed with the porter Tomas was ready for him.

"Did you hear tell of the *cleamhnas*?"

Tomas said nothing; but as no more seemed likely to come, he said:

"I did."

"'Tis the first in the year, and a great one so. There'll be heart-searching now, mind you! There'll be the hell of trouble, I've a notion."

"Ach, what will be, will be. Were you there yourself?"

"I was not. 'Twas Micky told me, and he heavy with the weight of porter in him. Fifty pounds went with her, he is after telling me. Who the hell'd think old Maurya had that handy crock smuggled in her house?"

"You'd do well not heeding all you'd hear."

"Didn't Micky tell me, and Tadhg Quilter after telling his father? 'Tis sure, man, clear and sure. Who the hell'd think that new fellow would be kissing Nancy? By gob, now, my fancy boyo Eoghan will be getting a cartridge in his creel of turf, and he proud and all."

And before Tomas could sound him further he had run off

down the road whistling and stamping his feet in the cold of the morning. So he set about his business, carefully watching every face to see if any news were hidden behind it. However, the morning was early, and few of those who had the news were abroad. Therefore, Tomas said nothing. He might never concede priority in knowledge or information, but he never carried tidings. He was never first with a tale.

At last Seumas the smith had news for him. Seumas was a secretive man: a little man with a tangled beard and red eyes swollen with turf-reek; and a man scant of words; but a stray sentence gave Tomas to know that the knowledge was there. So he offered a comment.

"'Tisn't an apt match is made," he said.

"'Tis and 't isn't."

"Wait yet. Would you not bend it all that much? Put it up this way."

"Would you have it so?" the smith asked angrily.

"You have it now. 'Tis hard to cut the glass so; 'tis. You'd have two pieces broke the way it was. Mind that now."

Seumas growled some inarticulate response.

"He's a strange man will have her now," Tomas continued in the same note. "There's none would expect it."

"Seumas Burke, is it? It's in the match he'll rest at Maurya's, and he gets fifty pounds with her, and she good in the looks. Maise, man, 'tis all one who has her. She's better in the looks than the service, I'll be bound so."

"'Tis equal which. 'Tis now. It was Tadhg Quilter made the match."

"Tadhg the Yank, was it? There's never the hole a person would be making but that schemer will be putting a nail in it. He came in that door once; he never came in it since."

"'Tis the very best bend I want now."

"Let you walk on the road, Tadhg the Yank," says I.

"I'll watch you don't trim and tidy my shuck," says I.

"Eoghan O'Clery was no likely lad, surely."

"Tomas Michael Padraic," Seumas said solemnly, "let you put no words again that fellow. Nancy Flaherty'd be a clean misdirection for that lad. She'd be extravagant for him, so she would. Going in and out of that door, he was, since he was a lad itself, a bit of a *gasur* only; and there's more goodness with him than kindness would put on any

lean dozen of lads in Maolan." And he plunged the iron into water, and threw it over towards Tomas.

"He's a wind blowing on the heath; he's a sea unruly on the rocks; and there's only yourself to put a decent word on him," said Tomas, preparing to go. "Well, she's gone from him now, clean and clever."

The smith stood in the door and watched Tomas turn down the hill carrying his hoop, with his stocky body carried on legs that bent slightly at the knees like springs, with his shoulders bent, and his keen, watchful eyes looking from his bearded face. "If you weren't that fond of the hard word!" said he, turning into his place again.

At the foot of the hill Tomas met Padraic McLir coming out of the field. He nodded at him, watching him closely.

"Well, it's a grand day now, Tomas; it is," said Padraic, after he had greeted him, and Tomas had returned the greeting watchfully.

"That's true enough now. There's not many would go against that."

"Have I the news rightly about the match that's in it?"

"'Tis likely you haven't. It'd be the first news that went yet was caught rightly in its travelling."

"I'm after hearing that Maurya Flaherty's Nancy was matched with the new schoolmaster from beyond. I heard tell it. Eoghan O'Clery will be taken badly, I'm thinking."

"I heard nothing of it," said Tomas. "It's the way it might be so, and it's the way it mightn't. You'd do better holding to the fine day that's in it. You'd do better so. You would. It's a fine day, indeed. I never saw a better. And we'll know what news is true when we are seeing what comes to it in the end of all and altogether."

Padraic McLir laughed. There seemed nothing else to do. Certainly there was nothing to say. He was puzzled; so he turned away, and was proceeding across to the strand when he heard Tomas calling him.

"Esht! Wait yet, Phadraig."

Padraic turned to him with slow expectation.

"You'd a right to go to Eoghan before the lads would be getting a hold of him."

"I will; I will now," said Padraic, at once turning back and making his way across the fields towards the river.

Tomas sat at his dinner that day in a very contemplative mood. He fingered the potatoes, shedding their skins,

thoughtfully. Cáit watched with a puzzled dignity. After dinner he lit his pipe, and, instead of going straight out, sat musingly at the end of the bench.

"You'd be beter occupied moving in your work," Cáit said to him. She stood in the middle of the house with her shawl about her head.

"Let you go out now and leave me the way I am," said Tomas. "'Tis likely I'll have my quiet days from this day out. A man should have no right to be marrying else."

"'Tis that way you ever had it, Tomas McLir, and others to be working," she said, and went out to her work in the field.

There was a curious play of affection between these two, dissimilar as they were, she in the quiet dignity that made her face seem delicately wrought though its features were blunted, he in his broad critical humour that smacked of Earth as much in its homeliness as in its shrewd sagacity.

His mind having been thrown off from its occupation with the day's business, he made an idle pretence of small tasks, he paid more than one visit to Sean's for a bottle of porter, and in the end he went to the end of the village, where he found Seumas Clancy, with whom he fell conversing. It was while he was so engaged that he noticed an oddly bent figure run across a field by the side of the river, making towards his cabin. From his distance it seemed as though the figure might once have been tall, erect and lissom, before the blow that had stricken it to this physical crumpledness, this shrunken deformity almost. It ran, bent forward, yet with extraordinary speed.

Tomas had not seen it before Seumas Clancy's own sight was watching it closely.

"Get you to those lads beyond, and hold them from coming up t'is way on the road," he said quickly to Seumas, as he hastened towards his cottage.

He met Eoghan coming running out of the house.

"You'd a right to be waiting," he said, "and taking the heat of the fire. It's a cold day now, and the wind turning to the north. Likely there'll be snow again this night. A man could be taking hares at the dawn of day, and he with a bare stick in his hand. Man dear, they'll be foundered with the frost that'll be on them."

Tomas did not look at Eoghan; nothing could have induced him to have done so; he went right past him to the

hearth. His words were spoken sharply, if only to guard himself against himself, and they rang as a tonic in Eoghan's mind. Eoghan's voice was like the very voice of pain itself, so hollow and broken were the sounds that came from him. It was with difficulty of speech he at last found utterance.

"Did you see Padraic McLir this day?"

"I did truly."

"Did you ask him to come speaking to me?"

"Now I did."

It was painful to see the way in which Eoghan avoided a direct approach to the question of questions in his mind. He had turned away from it, but now it faced him, and instead of speech a great groan came from him.

Tomas answered the question Eoghan could not put to him.

"Ach, likely it's talk only. 'Tis queer enough and crost enough to be true; but 'tis apt for a tale over and all. Let you keep yourself quiet. Sit now, and take a heat of the fire."

The words were spoken satirically, and the head was turned away, but there were strange tears, notwithstanding, in the mocking eyes. Yet it was not for this that he would not look at Eoghan. He shrank from the sight.

Eoghan stood in the middle of the floor, speechless, a stricken figure.

"Take the heat of the fire now," Tomas encouraged him.

"You're thinking it's a chance there was no *cleamhnas* at all in it. It is that you're thinking now? That she's biding yet the way she was the night I saw her? You're thinking it's only the skin of a tale they put on it?"

Eoghan spoke very slowly, and it was curious to notice the way in which he referred to the previous night as to an event vague distances away, though only an hour earlier it had been the immediate thing in his mind. Moreover, there was the labouring revival of hope in his tone.

But this revival of hope and strength in him produced the revival of cruelty in Tomas McLir's mind.

"Ach, 'tis the time for a *cleamhnas*. Wouldn't it be the thing itself Maurya Flaherty would be apt to arrange? What will be, will be; and it's not yourself nor myself will hinder the day it will come."

But Eoghan had gone from the house. Tomas went to the door of the house, but he could not see him up or down the road. He moved to the corner of the house, and saw

Eoghan disappearing into the dusk. He was not running now. He was striding forward, with his head and shoulders thrust forward, and his arms held out before him.

He heard the noise of a boot behind him; and, going into the house, he found Michael there, full of the news, with a certain enjoyment in it, a certain callousness, and a certain incongruous ill-fitting concern.

CHAPTER XVII.

TADHG QUILTER and Sean Burke went from the dancing straight to Father Hinnissey; and it was arranged that the wedding should take place the following day. The news came rather as a relief to Nancy. It only increased the general incredibility of things, and so supported her against circumstances. And, as the human mind in crises generally supports itself by flat opposites, the news helped her also by denying her all time for reflection, by enabling her to see the end of things immediately before her upon which to hold the attention.

Therefore she wished to keep James Burke away from her. The event, as an event, had to be, and to her experience was beyond recall; but his presence made it seem, not an event, but a personal relation. Especially as he was pressingly personal. Not that she disliked him. There were times that day when she felt that she would like him as well as any man, possibly better than most, if he would only keep his distance, and treat her, as she wished to treat him, as an event, as something to be accepted as beyond recall in the household relation. But he became affectionate—he became maudlin and caressive. That threw her whole being into revolt, because it altered the nature of the event; it even, curiously, made the event seem a thing that might possibly be foregone—and that was unsettling.

All that afternoon and evening she guarded herself against his affectionate assaults. He had left with the others, but it had not been long before he had returned. His very return, to say nothing of the attempted embraces it precluded, was in itself like an assault. When she had seen him coming up the *boithirin* she had at once called her mother, at work in the haggard, for protection. And Maurya gave

her protection. James threw out the broadest hints, at first to Nancy to come out, and then to Maurya to go out, but neither gave any heed to him. When James, sitting on the same bench with Nancy, attempted to slip his arm about her, and Nancy shuffled away, Maurya looked across steadily at him until he became uneasy. He protested querulously to Maurya of Nancy's lack of affection, even her lack of common kindness, and Maurya asked him why wouldn't he leave the girl alone and wasn't she flattered with the work and the thinking and all the botheration on her. So that James sat there moodily, unable to take himself away, yet with his presence there as much a torment to himself as it was to Nancy.

Nevertheless Maurya had cause to regret her defence. For when, soon after the fall of dusk, a clamorous and very human curlew-cry rang out above the house, Nancy at once rose up and went out. She did not wait to catch the startled expression that came into Maurya's eyes—that was caught and stifled as soon as it came—but went out at once, just as though the summons had touched some automatic and immediate response in her mind, slyly snatching her shawl as she passed the door.

Maurya watched James Burke closely, with a fearfulness that none could have detected in her stolidity of mien; but he showed neither surprise nor unrest. He was strictly decorous and non-committal, as though he had not noticed this departure. It was only when the return became longer and longer delayed that he grew more and more restless.

But Nancy did not throw a single thought backward for the benefit either of her mother or James Burke. The heath was white with snow; but the rare and delicate beauty of the night, austere and mysterious, made no appeal to her as she strode over the heath to where she saw Eoghan standing on the hillside. She went now, as she had arisen at first, automatically. She did not know why she went. The changed circumstances were not present in her memory. She simply went. There was Eoghan, standing as he always did at the one place; and she moved towards him as she had always done, only with no anticipations, and with a deadened mind.

They stood opposite one another speechless. There was cynical reproach from him to her, implied in his very pose, and in the bitter expression of his face as the faint light fell on it; and her manner suggested that she was definitely here

for that reproach. There was a hardening between them, as for a pending conflict. There was no need for words between them. He had come over the heath a stricken, broken, unknowing man, but the sight of her told him all he wanted to know, and it embittered and hardened him. She, on her part, had come automatically to him, unresisting, but, as his cold hostility struck on her, her attitude altered to defiance and challenge.

So they stood before one another, inevitably gravitating each to the other, inevitably attracted each by the other, but with something very like hatred hardening in each of them towards the other. Like magnets they attracted, like magnets they repelled each other. With the new repulsion a new attraction seemed established; a fateful attraction; and they were each dimly aware of this as they stood in a long, long silence, a silence meaningful and significant.

" 'Tis the devil's fool of a man will give his mind to any living woman," he said at last, as if expressing the refined bitterness of his thoughts in a sentence the simplicity of which was its last searching of experience.

The general reference to her sex made her flush, and the tone and expression with which the words were spoken stung her and increased her hostility; but she remained silent.

"What time was it you were speaking your promises to me?" he went on at last, searching in his mind for the time, and finding with a shock it was but the evening previous.

But she interrupted him.

"I never gave you promises," she said sullenly, less to him, indeed, than to herself.

" 'Tis a true word you're speaking now," he said slowly, a great clarity coming to his mind. "A true word and an honest word, so it is. You never did be speaking promises to me; you'll never speak promises to any man, and you'll never keep none. There'll no sweet milk come from you though you're the wonder for beauty. I was thinking you were putting the great promises to me, but you did only wonder at them falling from my own tongue. I mind that now. It's a great wonder the Almighty God would be putting beauty on the like of your sort. There'll be none that'll put their arms around you won't find you the bitter medicine to themselves, for you'll never put your truth where'll you'll easy put your lips. God help the man that's

in it now. God help any man picking a sweet apple that'll put his mouth astray."

He was speaking in a passionate monotone that would have flowed on indefinitely but for her interruption.

"What way could I hinder it?" she said defiantly. "Wasn't the match put on me? 'Tis easy talking."

"And didn't you come from me and I putting your hand to the purse of gold for the houseen? I am after cutting the sods away for it this day."

His voice rose up, and ended in the catch of a sob. He stifled it and held himself in control with all his strength; but the control he gained, in the gaining of it, drove his passion into a rigid intensity that she feared where she would not have feared any possible display of anger. Moreover, the picture he raised touched a quick pity in her; yet her gesture of sympathy only hardened him against her, and, re-acting on her, made her yet more defiant.

"'Tis easy talking," she repeated. "Who should want to be marrying—with any person that is in it? Aren't men all times clambering round a girl, and it's hard telling what it is they want. You'd easy be talking with a hundred where you'd not live with one; and they'd all be thinking of the marrying, and you wondering at them, the sort they are. It's a queer hard way the world is, with the one thing in it only to be doing, the thing a creature'd have most dread of. You to be talking of a house, and him to come kissing—*muise!* a person would be hard-set walking the road singing and easy in her mind, so she would. Well, I'm matched now, so 'tis equal."

She cleared her own mind in expressing it, but she confused his amazingly. Her words were like blows given him without any intelligible cause; and he set them down at once to the same shiftlessness that, as he saw it so clearly, had caused her to make a faith with him the very night she gave her hand to another.

"There'll come no happiness to you either. There'll come no happiness to any person who has no truth attached to her, so there won't. You'll be the ruin of the man that's in it now. Why did you come destroying the quietness I had in my own ways? Why did you so? There was never the friendliness between himself that's gone, God rest him, and myself after the day you came putting your lips to mine and putting the madness in my body. We'd the fighting, but

we'd the understanding till that time, I recollect that now. And to what purpose is it now? Clean waste, it is, and destruction to me. Weren't there the lads in the village over and all, that you'd your playing with, without your coming to me like the black screech of a dirty curse? You've the beautiful face, so you have, but there's the withered curse of a *cailleach* crouching in it for the man that'll find you."

He looked on her with repulsion and hatred; but, though she was not to know this, there was the inevitable attraction at the heart of it. She was afraid of him so. There was something uncanny about it, and a faint trembling came on her. So she became bitter and more defiant to hold the dread of him away.

"Well, you'll be well quitted of me. And 'tis likely you're right too."

"Why did you come ruining me? There'll be no peace on me from this day out. There'll be a travelling curse like any tinker's *cailleach* would be giving. And by Him that's living there'll be a curse on you too."

"Wasn't it you that came to me with your romancing and great talk?"

"Had you no heart for me that time, and me pouring my big love on you; or were you playing only?"

"It's no saying what I had. A person wouldn't know herself. It's over now, so it is; why did you come troubling me this night, and I set in my mind not to think of any man at all? If I only went into the big world the time I wanted there wouldn't be all this trouble on me. I'm hindered here. I wasn't for this place."

She was in tears now; but they were tears of anger and indignation.

"Have you your heart set on me now?"

"I haven't at all."

"It's hard to believe you. Had you your heart set on me when I did be coming meeting you?"

"Not at all. I was afraid of you."

"You were laughing at me, so, the nights that were like the shining stars to me."

"I was not then."

"What is it you're meaning at all? Will you put me out of the madness that's on me?"

"How should a person know how it was? You were the equal of another."

He was halted then, breathing hard, with his hands clenched by his side in a terrific rigidity. He seemed almost as though he was about to raise them and pound them on her shoulders. How was he to know that she was as uncertain about her mood then as he was maddened at her words now; or that her effort—for herself not for him—to know what her real relation with him had been during those past nights was confused and distressed in her mind by the vivid change that had come on her like a stab of pain the previous night? For the first time she was really seeking, in her own vagarious way, to know what her liking for him had been and was; and it was just this perfect, this painful sincerity of hers that maddened him.

“I was the equal of another,” said he, with a dry sob in his voice, all of exasperation and all of tears. “I came to you through the dark nights and the nights with moons in it, wasting for you and destroyed for the sight of you, and I was the equal of another! *Muise*, I was the equal of another, so I was, and himself in the house beyond with the hard hate in him seeing the back of me going out of the door. I held you in my two arms, thinking the riches of the big world was mine, and the big hills smiling on me in a night of stars; and I was the equal of another! And you took the big love I was giving you, and you turned to another, because it was equal which. A long, long curse on you!”

He stopped abruptly. She was surprised and very resentful at this extraction of the meaning of her words, but when she looked up at him she became frightened. He looked as if he were going mad. He was still bent forward slightly towards her, with his hands clenched at his sides as though he were about to lift them up to strike her; but it was the expression of his face that startled her, not the physical threatening which meant nothing to her. He seemed out of himself—there is no other phrase to express the extraordinary impression he gave that he had either left the body, or had dislocated himself from the body. The dim light falling on him, and the heath rising behind him clothed in shining snow, were only responsible for the setting of a terrible transfiguration of the man himself. There was something, not devilish, but demoniac in his expression: horrible, as it is often horrible to see beyond a lifted veil to new things; and powerful, and infinitely pitiful, for it spoke

tragedy, not only in the causes inducing it, but not less in the result itself wherein the man seemed a helpless agent of his passion and agony.

The horror of it was such that Nancy was held there helpless in spite of her desire to fly.

"Eoghan, what's the matter with you?" she said to him. "Eoghan, dear, what is it you're saying?" Unwittingly she used the endearment she had never used to him before. "Eoghan, Eoghan, will you stop?"

For he was speaking in a low murmur of a voice, with a slow rhythmic cadence, and in a tongue that she did not know. It was not Irish, though there were Irish words interspersed through it. His expression changed with the words he spoke and their cadence, just as a lake will change colour with the winds that move over it; but in words and expression he seemed always the agent of something else rather than an agent of, and in, himself—as if he had laid hold of something that now used him instead of his using it.

It dawned on her that he was cursing her.

"Eoghan, Eoghan, will you stop it?" She clung to his arm, and wrenched at him. "Will you stop it; will you stop it, Eoghan? Don't be speaking so. What are you saying? Stop now! Will you not stop? Don't be saying it. Oh, *Mhuire, Mhuire!* Whatever will I do now? I'm destroyed from this out. What'll I do? What'll I do?"

She was unnerved and limp before him, as he drew to a close. There were no tears in her eyes though she was convulsed with sobs. She would have collapsed but for the sense of his utter detachment from her.

Then in the long silence she looked up at him, and saw him standing erect, looking down on her with a bitter smile twisted across his face.

"You're cursed now," he said. "You're cursed in all your marryings. The man that will marry you now or ever, will find you a curse to him, and he to you; and either one of you will die foul to the sorrow of the other. There'll be no quiet in any house you'll build or bide in, but your tongue will be lifted against the man, and his tongue will be lifted against you, and you'll wither each other and all that'll come betwixt and between you. The money you give will never pass over; and all any man will ever get from you will be a murrain on his house and his goods, on his

land and his skin and his mind. Bide you and see the curse will live long, my beautiful woman," and, turning on her, he went quickly up the heath towards the mountains disappearing into the gloom.

She stood there terrified. Then, with his disappearance, she reassured herself.

"Ah, there are no such things. 'Tis only *taidhbhse* talk for children. I'm well quitted of him."

Nevertheless she was trembling violently as she went back over the heath.

She met her mother outside the house looking for her.

"What kept you?" Maurya began angrily. "Himself is mad now, missing you." But she stopped, and her anger vanished at the sight of the girl.

"She's taken badly with the botheration," she explained to a James Burke, tear-stained, white and angry. "It's a strange thing for any girl thinking of marrying. You wouldn't know it. Don't mind her now. She'll be grand in the morning. 'Tis always the way, so it is."

So she bundled him out into the night, while Nancy, paying no heed to either of them, went benumbed to her room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE following morning it all seemed to Eoghan like an incredible dream; a dream of which he did not feel altogether proud, and which he therefore banished from his thought. He had been astir on the hills most of the night, until in the small hours the setting of the moon drew him homeward. For no part of that time was he aware of himself. He had no memory of misfortune or the day's doings; and the next day he only remembered, as in a distant vision of extraordinary rareness, the snow-draped sides of the mountains as he had paced over them in what may best be described as an exalted absence of mind—such as intense passion or agony may bring to the soul.

Having neglected to house his lambs the previous night, he found one of them frozen dead; and he carried it back across his shoulders, and flung it in the corner of the house before he went across the fields up to the heath above Islean, drawn fatefully to see the wedding cavalcade. He need not

have done so; yet he went deliberately so that he could cross the bare place where he had cut away the sods the previous day. There lay his long spade just as he had dropped it; yet, though he had gone deliberately to the place, and though he now deliberately crossed from end to end of the place he had cut, the significance of his action was quite unsought, and he was unaware of what he did, or why he did it.

There is a boundary beyond which the human frame cannot take suffering, and when that boundary is invaded deadness and numbness ensue. So it was with Eoghan now; instinct in reaction dominated by a kind of dreamlike deliberation. Thus he watched the cavalcade emerge from Islean and take its way between loch and sand-dunes without any seeming trace of pain. He even fixed his attention on the front cars to see where the bride and bridegroom sat. The others did not interest him; but he wondered, wondered quite calmly and curiously, what the thoughts of these two were, going to their mated lives. And only a slight conscious bitterness crossed his thoughts all the long while the party was away at the chapel, so steeped were they in the larger bitterness that had created them.

It was curious what aroused him, what wrought him, suddenly and in an instant, to strong and active pain. He was watching the returning cavalcade emerge from Coisabhau, coming from the chapel upon the hillside, with the same speculation as he had watched it go. The whole of the plain from Coisabhau to Islean lay beneath him, and he could see the string of cars and horses issue from the further village. Then the lads, coming to the level stretch of grass beside the road, began to race. Bare-backed, intrepid riders all of them, they came toward him in a mad tumult, seeking to head each other off for the narrow space beyond. In full wild gallop they came, taking stream, hillock and bank unheeding, charging at each other recklessly. The folk stood on the cars to see the better; and Eoghan craned forward eagerly, his whole nature astir. As the stampede narrowed, and the riders sought to charge each other into the ditch and against the dune, he was wild with excitement. His eye measured the riders, and he judged of them, their mounts, their riding, and their tactics as though the whole race were an issue in his own blood. He was part of it. It lived in him. Yet he was detached enough to judge of it, and longed for a moment to join in it.

Then when it had melted away as suddenly as it had come, and the cars, with what seemed by comparison a painful slowness, wound along the road toward the village beneath him, anger and bitter resentment possessed him as he watched the final triumph against him. His excitement of the moment previous had been more than it seemed; had he ridden among the riders there would have been a recklessness by no means born wholly of the race. And now, as the cavalcade disappeared into the village, he sat there with every vein in his body burning hot, and his brain seared with hopelessness.

He gave no heed to the man coming towards him over the heath with a fowling piece under his arm. When he noticed that he himself was the objective his instant thought was to rise and go. But he waited instead.

It was Michael McLir.

"How's yourself?" asked Michael.

"I'm middling only," Eoghan answered.

Michael stood above him eyeing the hill and scanning the fields below, silent for a long time. It was as if Eoghan were not there at all. Then he spoke again.

"There's a great lot of curlews below."

"Why wouldn't there be?" said Eoghan, not looking.

"I was searching for you back the way," said Michael.

"Is that so?" said Eoghan, still unheeding.

"There's some of the lads will be going up to the wedding-house this night, and they'll dress where they did always be dressing for that work. There'll be a good drop of porter with Tadhg Quilter in it, surely. We're wanting one yet, and I left it so thinking you'd be wishing to be one of the party." Michael spoke jocosely, and with a crude, blunt-edged attempt at humour.

For a moment Eoghan did not know what he meant; and then a kind of madness took hold of him. Nevertheless, he endeavoured to keep a hard hold of himself, and said:

"I will not; I will not."

"Wouldn't you do well to be sergeant? 'Tis what I was to be, but you'd be good so, seeing the way it is now."

Eoghan was silent. The madness ran riot with his thinking.

"You'd not like the lads to know you were in it," Michael said, thinking not of Eoghan's susceptibilities but of the success of his plan. "You could be dressing in the

old stable of ours and we'd join the lads ready and all. If I gave you the ribbon to twist on your arm going the road you'd be sergeant then. Herself would never guess you were in it, and you dancing with her."

The madness was loose in Eoghan's brain. The plan itself was salted just to his recklessness, and all his anger and resentment rose to abet it.

"What time was it?" he asked, endeavouring to keep his excitement out of his voice.

"Ten o'clock in the old stable of ours," said Michael "The lads will be down the old ways." And without a further word or sign he went with heavy swinging strides down towards the flight of curlew he had seen.

CHAPTER XIX.

NOTHING that Maurya could say would persuade Nancy to tell what had happened the previous night. She simply did not reply. Indeed, she gave little heed to anyone or to anything, attending carefully to the arrangements for the wedding, with an eye the more attentively held towards friends and spectators because she wished to hold it away from other things.

Therefore Nancy was abstracted all day, which created no wonder at all, the occasion being what it was—indeed, it made the event even more on event, seeing that the person chiefly concerned took it so seriously. Her whole effort was concerned in keeping away, firstly, the memory of the previous night, and, secondly, the petulant caresses of James Burke. The latter was easier than the former. Do what she would, her mind kept returning with terror to the memory of Eoghan's cursing, and the way in which it had transformed him. In any relaxation of her will the visual image of him came at once before her, and a new emotion, of pity and of tenderness, was kindled in her that she dreaded even more than her superstitious fear.

James Burke was distraught with anxiety. Nancy won was an infinitely more remote person than Nancy woo'd; an extraordinary happening that his mind refused to understand. The more he claimed his new right to caress, the more difficult did it become to lay hands upon her. That

should have been an unbelievable thing; but there the fact was. He doubled his pursuit; but it was like laying hold of a mist, or battering at a cliff, with all the bewilderment that follows pathetically on such efforts. He was no elate James Burke the wedding morning. A certain animal madness was aroused in him, to which his boyish irresponsibility gave a trampling carelessness.

So that it was not precisely an ideal wedding pair that mounted the one side of the car for the journey back from the chapel. His nearness to Nancy excited James Burke; and seeing that Nancy had no space now in which to evade him, he intended to take proper advantage of that nearness. She nearly fell off the car trying to evade his encircling arm, and when Tadhg Quilter twitted him on his amorosness he contented himself with taking possession of her hand. He held that forcefully in spite of all her attempts to pluck it away from him.

Yet to the spectators all went well enough. He was the exultant husband—too exultant; but then he was not a native to Maolan, and had not the Maolan strong dignity—and she was just the bride any one of their daughters would have made, only allowably more beautiful. It was not expected that she would be talkative. Beyond her responses she said not a word to anyone. On the way back from the chapel custom decreed that they should all stop at O'Dochertaigh's for a preliminary refreshment; and she sat in the middle of the crowded, muddy, talkative, porter-drinking, whiskey-drinking roomful of friends, on the chair that had been procured for her, without a word or sign to anyone. That, too, was only natural. It was just a little excessive under the circumstances; but Nancy had her own way about her.

The only fault was that when the dancing began, both at this first halt and at Clancy's beyond at Islean, she would take no part in it. A small space was cleared in the centre of the crowded room by dint of crushing everybody close together against the walls. In that tight mass the porter continued to be drunk; and in the space that had been created Mary Quilter and Sean Burke gravely opened the dancing, which was taken up more abandonedly in sets and couples, by the young people. But Nancy did not participate. She sat gravely watching them, with James hovering around her, a flushed and agitated figure. It was agreed to let the

girl alone, for what way wouldn't she be thinking, and she just changing her life and all, but the tacit agreement was that there were always the queer ways attached to Maurya's Nancy, and that she was the proudful unnatural woman a person would be hard-set living with, so she was.

The drinking and dancing at O'Dochertaigh's and Antony Clancy's and the journey home occupied the better part of four hours, so that it was five o'clock before the cavalcade arrived at the house. The first part of the day's proceedings was over, and the more immediate members of the family settled to their meal, while the others dispersed for the time. The evidences of porter were conspicuous, both among those who dispersed and those who remained; yet the man who looked the worse for wear had really not travelled far upon that particular road. James Burke had been too perturbed about his newly gotten wife to have had time for drinking. Yet his strongmat of hair was ruffled, his face was flushed and his manner excited; and he looked to be worse than any. He had become wild and provocative in his manner towards Nancy; in which course of tactics he was encouraged by an increasingly uproarious Tadhg Quilter, watched anxiously and coldly by Maurya, and taken pretty roughly to task by his brother. Sean Burke was a man who never, to a casual observer, showed the worse for drink. It merely made him tighter and compacter; but it made him an uncommonly awkward person to cross. So that the conflicts between the two brothers, to say nothing of the new husband's provocative attitude to the new wife, always held the party over the deeps of tragedy.

Tadhg Quilter, however, provided the necessary relief. The continuous quarrelling seemed almost a proper and natural thing as he exhorted James to husband-like tenderness, and excited James and Sean alike to have no botheration from the other, but to settle the matter once for all. Mary Quilter attempted mildly to still him, but appeared indulgently amused at him.

The only person who appeared entirely unmoved was Nancy herself. Her abstraction had become a cold hostility to all. The provocative amorousness with which James continually attacked her was in great measure induced by the fear she begot in him. She sat at the table, or moved about to help Maurya and Mary O'Dochertaigh with a calm dignity that revealed her likeness to her mother, while being yet

manifestly drawn from its own sources. She thus became the centre of the party; and the more so because the others avoided her. They pivoted about her, as planets may pivot about a sun, with a marked distance between them and it.

The result was that when the others began to drift back for the night the party within the house had settled down to a strained and uneasy silence. Even Tadhg Quilter's hilarity was abashed; changing to querulous complaint; a change that was assisted by the sobriety that threatened him. Whereas James sat by the fire and sulked.

The night changed all this, however. Those that came drifting in had no knowledge of strain; and if they had it would not have effected them greatly. The wind had, with sunset, shifted suddenly to the north-west, and the wind was beginning to buffet at the house; but this was as it might be, and a theme for comment only. The fiddler had come, the house was full; and very slowly, as it were reluctantly, the dancing began. In truth, the house was full to overflowing, so that it would have seemed impossible to clear a space for dancing. The dancing cleared its own space; the dancers, with the deliberation proper to those with a night before them, beginning in the very midst of a medley of people. Mugs of porter passed around the benches; and if a storm brewed without, the heat was sufficient within.

It was within an hour of midnight when those who stood outside the door to cool themselves came in with the information that the *cleamaraigh* were without; and Tadhg Quilter, as the man of the house for the occasion, went to welcome them in.

There were eight of them, with white petticoats about them, and white shirts that were stuffed out with straw. They each wore a tall mask, made of straw, shaped to a cone, and twisted at the summit into a fantastic knot. The base of the cone rested upon the shoulders, and the summit reached a foot higher than the crown of the head.

Tall, ghostly figures the eight of them made in their ancient costume. It was, of course, impossible to tell who they were—that was a secret none was ever permitted to share—and indeed, save in the matter of height, there was nothing to choose between them. Their very build was the same, so stuffed were they with straw. The hats of two of them brushed the stuff hanging from the rafters, imped-

ing their motions; and one of these bore a staff, had two ribbons across his shoulders, and had some ribbon twisted about his left arm. It was he who was in charge of the band.

At their entry the dancing stopped, for during their stay the direction of the proceedings passed to them. They came into the centre of the house in a solid body, standing there pair behind pair, with the sergeant and his fellow leading them. With his staff he touched two girls and two of his men. The fiddle sounded, and the four so chosen began to dance. When that was concluded, he touched two other girls, and the dancing continued.

Then the sergeant touched one of the girls with his staff, and, turning deliberately about, touched the bride. All that day Nancy had refused to dance; and now she said coldly and petulantly :

“ I won't be dancing.”

For answer the sergeant touched her again upon the shoulder.

“ I've no mind to be dancing; and I won't now,” she said.

“ Go out now; go out now,” Tadhg said to her; and voices from all parts of the house called to her: “ Come out now.” “ Make her come out,” “ Would you be refusing the *cleamaraigh* now?” “ Send her out to the dancing.”

Again the sergeant touched her with his stick, very emphatically and deliberately.

Whereupon a man standing beside her took her by the shoulders and lifted her bodily. “ Would you be refusing the *cleamaraigh*?” he said. “ Go out now; and don't be sitting there with the cross looks on you. Take her now?” he said, and he pushed her out violently towards the sergeant.

At once the sergeant took hold of her and held her forcibly. The fiddle began, and almost before Nancy knew what was happening she was being forced to a reel by sheer muscular strength.

Something in the grasp that held her startled Nancy. An echo of something familiar sounded in her body in the very grip with which she was swung about to face the other pair where they stood ready and waiting. She was moving through the dance itself before she recovered her astonishment; and then she lost knowledge of everything in the

bewildering thought that she was dancing with Eoghan himself. She could not believe her thought. It was incredible, an impossible thing. Eoghan O'Clery could not be among the straw-boys. Yet every nerve in her body cried out that this was he. She scanned him closely, a maddening excitement in her blood; but the mask revealed nothing of the personality behind it.

In the aware-ness of her body she knew that the excitement in her was a fellow to the excitement in the man that danced with her. It was no dance that claimed them, but a vertigo that swung them to and fro like one thing. She had no sense of time or place, but just a dizzy realisation of something that possessed her and dominated her.

After what seemed an immense time she felt herself being released; and she sat bewilderingly seeking to recollect herself, when she felt another touch upon her shoulder. Obediently she stood up and moved forward into the centre of the room. Apparently an intervening dance had had time to conclude, and she went toward the white figure where it awaited her, vaguely examining it to see could she discover any familiar tokens about it. But the full breast, the bulky figure, and the great mask showed nothing of similarity to Eoghan O'Clery.

Yet now something of terror took hold of her. She shrank from the grasp that awaited her; but it took her as though it knew of her reluctance. There was something rough and wild in the way in which she was held that made her shudder; and yet she held to that figure almost with tenderness. If there was something of wild passion, even cruelty, in the grasp that held her, and swung her round in a new dance, there was something not less wild in the affection with which she returned the grasp. If this strange, bulky figure held her ruthlessly, she in her turn clung to it passionately.

Again she was surrendered, and again she was claimed, going obediently to something she dreaded in every bone of her body. She did not know how often she danced; but she realised that every time she did dance the dance was long continued, beyond all custom, for she sank hot and breathless on her chair gasping for air.

Indeed, the length of the dances in which Nancy took part was the most marked intimation to the company that something unusual was taking place. Nancy's strangeness con-

firmed it. But most were taking great pleasure in her taming—for so it was they conceived it after her initial refusal. James, however, was wildly concerned. In between the dances he sought to attract Nancy's attention; he spoke to her; he suggested to her that perhaps it would be better if she were not dancing; but she did not even hear him; and he appealed distractedly to Tadhg Quilter. Whereupon Tadhg went forward and suggested to the *cleamaraigh* that they should come out and take some more porter, making no disguise of the hint that it was possibly time they were going. In this he was freely assisted by the lads, who felt that it was full time the dancing reverted to them. But the sergeant seemed as little to hear them as Nancy heard her man. He stood at the top of the room, staff in hand, and continued to mark out the dancers. In every alternative four he took his part with the bride.

At last in the middle of one of the dances the fiddler stopped abruptly, and stood up.

"I'll fiddle no more, nor I will," said he. "I never did fiddle such long dances, Maurya Flaherty, and I'll be away out of this to my own place. That's what I'll be doing now, and be damned to the whole of you." He was hot and flushed with his work, and waved his fiddle angrily at Maurya.

At once an uproar succeeded. Tadhg Quilter got between him and the door, and held him, arguing with him. The lads were in a mass together near the door complaining at being balked of their dances, and they called out that it was time, and time enough, for the *cleamaraigh* to be going, and let Pat Clancy stop to do the fiddling for themselves. From the older men a variety of advice issued. Some urged Pat to go; others bade him to be no damned fool and to stop; but all seemed chiefly content to abet an uproar. And the old women came out from their gossip and whiskey in the inner room to see what might be the cause of the noise, and to help if need be with advice.

But in the centre of the house stood Nancy and the sergeant of the *cleamaraigh* as they had stopped in their dancing. They still held each other; but his grasp had shifted from her waist to her arms, where his fingers bruised her flesh with the tensivity with which he held her.

Her face was close to the mask, and she was whispering in through the rushes.

“ Is it you, Eoghan? ” she whispered. “ Is it you, lad? Ah, will you not tell me? Whisper it to me; do, lad! ”

She was altogether heedless of the people and the noise about her. She was oblivious of everything, in the vertigo that had caught her, but the maddening desire to confirm her conviction that this was Eoghan O’Clery before her, holding her in a grasp the very intimacy of which cried familiarly in her body. But he said nothing. He thrust her brusquely away from him; pushed her quite deliberately towards James Burke, who was watching her with white face and starting eyes; and swung his arm to signal the *cleamaraigh* out into the night.

As she staggered towards him, James came forward quickly and anxiously to take her; but she shrank away from his touch. She curved to the chair by the hearth, and fell, rather than sat, upon it; a fire in her brain as she endeavoured with all her strength to withhold the tears that threatened to tear her. She was gasping for air; but everybody stood in a mass in the house arguing with Pat Clancy, and telling him that now the *cleamaraigh* were gone with their play-boy tricks all would be well again, if he would only take a sup of porter and begin again. None heeded her but James, and his nearness stifled her more than the intolerable heat.

By the time Pat was appeased, and had partaken of some of his brother’s porter, and was ready to continue, it was discovered that Nancy was not well—although it was not noticed that James was not much better than she.

She sat on her seat trembling violently, and James stood beside her with a big tragedy in his face, his rounded eyes looking as though swollen with the tears about to flow. Do what they would, none could arouse her. It was only when Maurya shook her violently by the shoulder and flung her from her chair that she started up.

“ Will you let me alone? ” she cried. “ I’m ruined this day; I’m ruined this day, so I am. Don’t be touching me. I wouldn’t have you to be touching me, ” she said to James, who had put out his hand towards her.

“ What’s the matter with you? ” Maurya asked angrily. “ Is it black madness has come on you, destroying the whole house this great day? ”

“ It’s the dancing has her whirled, ” the tall man said who had pushed her out into it.

"Cease now; cease now," Tadhg said angrily. "Will you hinder all the pleasure now, with the night a lad only? Have sense, Nancy. Give her a sup of the stuff."

"Let me alone now," Nancy cried, wringing her hands. "I'm ruined from this day out. The heart of me is broken. Will you not stand gaping at me, with your porter and your drinking?" And she struck the glass of whiskey out of Tadhg's hands, distributing it over the company. "Go out, now. It's I that am the woman in this house now; and I won't have a person in it. Ochone! Ochone!"

She ran through the company, that moved aside for her, and, driving out any old women that were still there, she shut herself in the further room. They heard her dragging the furniture, and stacking it against the door.

"The disgrace of it, the disgrace of it!" Tadhg Quilter said, wild with grief as he saw the company trailing hurriedly out of the door. "An empty house, and the night a lad. An empty house, and the dawn not in it. It'll never lift up from this out. It'll never lift its laughing." He seemed too distressed to attempt to hinder the outgoing stream.

"What's this now?" Sean Burke asked, striding up to Tadhg, and standing pugnaciously before him. "What's this lad wedded to now, will you tell me that? How was it you drew me from my place beyond, and all this trap and snare to be stepping into? What's the way with this lad now, and herself shut fast against him. Will you tell me that?"

"She's taken mad, and the house will never lift with the funning broken," was all Tadhg said.

"Come from this, Seumas," said Sean Burke. "We'll be going the road."

"I won't; I won't," said James, pouting and obstinate.

"Then you'll rest here surely," his brother said, and shuffling into his great coat he stumped out into the storm that was raging.

There were only Tadhg and Mary Quilter, Maurya Flaherty and James Burke left in the house; and they stood looking at one another, surrounded by benches, and many mugs with or without porter, just as they had been left in a dishevelled house. Both the men were troubled; both the women were calm. There was just the ripple of anxiety over Maurya's impassive face, and Mary Quilter seemed to be

speculating on something quite other than the trouble before them; whereas Tadhg's perturbation had overcome all the effects of porter on him; and the tears in James Burke's eyes only seemed held back by the anger and general incredulity with which he frowned upon them all. There was something of his brother's foursquare poise upon his legs about him; and he seemed to be endeavouring to grasp somewhat of the same incision of manner before he made his angry demand upon the company. Yet it was Mary Quilter who spoke first. She spoke in a vaguely wondering way.

"There's that man gone on the road now, and where will he go to, I'd like to know. Isn't he resting with us, and the house shut against him? Go after him, Tadhg, now, and bring him back, or go on with him itself."

She had scarcely concluded before the door was flung open with the violence of the storm, and Sean Burke stood within the doorway.

"Will you come, or will you not come?" he asked sharply of Tadhg. "What way am I to take shelter this night, and you staying after me? It's the hell of a storm that's in it."

"I'm coming, man dear," Tadhg said, rather humbly. "We'd best be going," he said to his wife; then to Maurya as he put on his coat: "It'll be right and grand yet; take her easy now, take her easy"; and finally to James: "She's troubled now; 'tis the way a woman is; but let you be soft and easy, and it'll slip right surely." Having included everybody, he went straight out as though glad to leave all anxieties behind him. Sean Burke strode after him down the *boithirin*, and Mary followed him.

Left alone in the house, James stood with his angry expostulation directed towards Maurya. Then, as a huge buffet of wind seemed to arouse a thought in him, he strode over towards the inner door and struck it with his fist with all his might.

"Open that door, and be letting me in," he cried out. "I'll murder you, you damned spit of a she-devil. Let me in. Let me in. Let me in."

"You'll not come into this room this night," a smothered voice spoke from within. "I've been the great fool itself; but you'll not come in now."

He beat upon the door; he tried to heave it open with his shoulder; he sought even to climb over the partition; but

it was all unavailing; and he turned in tears and anger to Maurya.

“When this day’s a year aged,” she said calmly, “you’ll not put the weight of a *traithnin* upon it, and you taking all the days as they come. There’s the weddings I’ve seen, and the man that’s married with a broken head on him before the dawn streaked the sky. And there’s no recollection of it now. Let you sit easy by the fire, or rest in the bed that’s forninst you. It’ll be equal to-morrow; equal and straight.”

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was a pitiful wildness in the way in which Eoghan now turned to Earth. There had been passion before; it became frenzied now. There had been consciousness before, and it became so intimate now that he acquired the habit of talking aloud as he walked the hills.

Sometimes during his days, and often during his nights in sleep, the visual image came before his mind of a strong masterful shape, woman-like in face and roundness of limb, darkly red of hue, with great round eyes, dark and deep, into which he had perforce to look, but which wrought terror in him as he looked. The vision often awoke him as he slept, as though it had invaded his house, crowding it out; and he would go terrified out into the night, and sit still for hours till the terror changed into a delight that was almost intolerable to bear. Never did the image change; and never did he doubt its reality.

Yet the nearness to Nancy was intolerable. The chance of seeing her—especially after that wedding night—gave him agony in the very thought. His sensibility caused him to think of himself as a marked man, though in fact everything in the life of Maolan had fallen back into the normal, and he himself was only an occasional fireside topic; but this very sensibility made him long to leave the place. Above all, so long as he remained here just so long would his wound refuse to heal. The very familiarity of the scenes that bound him to them drove him from them. He never deliberately evaded the wound in the heath where he had cut the earth for his house; and he never deliberately sought

it; but always when he saw it his mind was stung with remembrance.

As constantly as the thought of leaving arose he put it away. It did not diminish, but he would not face it. And one day it arose at him in a merciless attack.

He had been out the whole day on the mountains; and towards dusk he was making his way down Cruach Mór by the side of a little *gleann* leading to the sea. As he reached the valley he saw a figure crouched upon a rock, looking out seaward. He made his way towards it through the dusk, and saw that it was a little lad. A sudden craving for fellowship pricked him into speaking to the lad. But before he could speak the boy clambered down from the rock and ran towards him barefooted through the heather.

"I saw you coming down the mountain," he said, running beside Eoghan as he strode down the *gleann*. "It's a grand evening now. Isn't it queer and strange the way the light does shine on the sea? A person would think. . . . A person would think. . . . Is it to the path you're going?"

"I am," said Eoghan, though he had no particular objective. "Did you come for the cattle?"

"I put them up the road. They'll be right so."

"You didn't come for them so?"

"My father had some money earned with the masoning, and I bees afeared of him so. I bees often coming to the mountains all the night to miss the weight of his hand. He's a terrible rough man, my father is; he's very heedless with a drop on him. I bees often up in the mountains all during the night. I did used to be terrible cold, but it's rare and brave on the mountains. I'm afraid sometimes. I'll be coming with you now."

"I don't have a recollection of you."

"Ah, you wouldn't. You're a terrible lonesome man. I'm Brian O'Dochertaigh, and my father's the mason."

There was something in the matter-of-fact humanity of the little figure running beside him that touched Eoghan wonderfully; and they walked on for a long time in silence while Eoghan was thrilled to a yearning tenderness that would have greatly astonished the little lad if he had yielded to it as he so keenly desired to do.

"We're making great travelling," said Brian O'Dochertaigh then. "You wouldn't think we'd be coming all the

way it is in that bit of a time." He looked back over his shoulder at the side of the mountain as he shuffled forward, running to keep pace with Eoghan's onward stride.

"'Tis easier to be travelling fast than to be travelling slow; you'd be tired to be always travelling slow," said Eoghan.

"Well, it is now," said Brian doubtfully. "The light's gone from the sea now; but there does always be lights on the sea. All sorts of lights there bees. In the darkness of the nights there do be lights. It's queer and strange the way it is. It's queer altogether, mind you. A person would be afraidy sometimes to be looking at it. A person would be more afraidy looking at it if he did be looking a long time. 'Tis fearsome on the mountains too. 'Tis. But it's better that way the longer you do be so. It's queer and strange the way it is altogether. You'd be destroyed in your house leaking the way it is. I do be often passing it; and it's leaking badly, mind you."

"It'll want new scraws under the thatch. The scraws are destroyed with the age. It'll want a new weight of thatch moreover."

"Ah, and it'll want the walls mending too. The house is badly, mind you. It's the mortar should be picked out, and put in new. It's rotted all away. Likely the joists are destroyed too. Cement and lime is the best mortar; but there's a great expense attached to it. It's a bad sort of a house now, yours is."

"It'll rest now till the summer's in it. There's nothing can be done with this bad weather."

"It is bad now. 'Wasn't it you cursed Nancy Flaherty?"

"I did not," Eoghan said shortly, but the question had struck him like a buffet.

"And all the trouble coming to her after! Isn't it terrible now to have a curse put on you?"

Eoghan was a little benumbed by these unexpected buffets from the little, innocent, bare-headed, bare-footed figure that ran beside him up the path with an easy shuffling motion. He was dazed rather; and so reduced to silence. But, after the due lapse of silence, the chatter continued.

"It's a terrible thing, mind you. See the curse you put on Nancy Flaherty, and all the trouble that's coming to that place now!"

To say that Eoghan gasped would be to find a physical instance of the state that befell his mind. But the chatter went innocently on.

"Father does be saying you're the wild man altogether. Is it rightly you have acquaintance with the *taidhbhsi*? I wouldn't like to be meeting the *taidhbhsi*. I'd be afraidy, I'm thinking. I'd run away. The times my father beats me and I go running to the mountains I do be greatly afear'd of the *taidhbhsi*. But father says you do have acquaintance with them. He says they do be wonderful easy with you. He says you're a man a person wouldn't wish to be meeting, and you crossing him. They do be saying in the village you put a great curse on Nancy Flaherty, and the house does be blistered now. The gasurs from beyond are saying the new schoolmaster does be talking to himself the time you'd wonder he wouldn't be learning the lessons. The gasurs do be laughing at him. He'll be losing his school, I'm thinking. You have him fair destroyed, you have; and father says it's the *taidhbhsi* have the havoc done. Do they make you afraidy?"

"Who's that?" said Eoghan bewilderedly, his mind thinking of the people and their talk that pattered out through this little mouth.

"The *taidhbhsi* themselves. It's Seumas, the smith, was saying they'd be the reasonable folk maybe, and a person a good man himself. But my father says Seumas might have the acquaintance too, he's that lonesome sort of a man. My father is afraidy of them. My mother does be laughing at them. She says it's only the people's talk, and a reasonable person wouldn't heed it. The master says it's fit talk for the books. But it's queer and strange the way things are sometimes. Do you ever mind seeing them? Tell me, now."

Eoghan was greatly distressed. He was silent for a long time; then endeavoured to break the conversation away.

"We made great tracks. We're nearly to the road now."

"We did now. You wouldn't think we came all that way, you wouldn't. But it's the company does always make the time to go quickly."

"It's dark now."

"Well, it is. There's someone lighting a fire on the heath beyond. What would he be doing, I wonder."

" I'm going up through the land. Good-night, *gasur!* "

" Good-night now ! " said Brian O'Dochertaigh without turning round, ambling quickly forward on the roadway.

The following morning Eoghan came out of his house, keen to see the stretch of the mountains with the first light of dawn. He felt like an emigrant, bleeding in his mind because his life was being wrenched away from its roots.

PART THE SECOND

CHAPTER I.

EARTH was stretched out in lovely renewal of life; and the late spring day held Maolan like a beautiful jewel in the blue of the seas under the blue of heaven. The stirring of growth over the hills appeared like a wave that gently washed over them: a wave of soft light; no more; yet transfiguring the whole land. With the disappearance of the pools in the bogs and marshes bleakness slid out of the valleys. Even where the water yet lay, the warm light made them bright and rounded instead of flat and grey. The gesture of sternness was yet over the island. That was Earth's characteristic hue, with whatever momentary mood it might be qualified and conveyed; but a glow of conscious joy had passed over the face of its severity, till it was, not less austere, and neither more nor less passionate, but ampler and uplifted into splendour.

The larks had lost themselves in the folds of blue overhead, from whence their song fell like a rain of music over the land. Mated robins, busy though they were with affairs they sharply communicated to one another, ceased continually, to take leisure and fill the air with songcraft. Thrushes sang, and reflected as they sang, and wondered at their reflection. They repeated their themes, pivoted upon them, circled in them, and swung onward, swayed by their passion till they were hypnotised by it, lost in it as over seas of wonder. Yellow-hammers stabbed the warm air with song on whins where the bloom began to burst like points of yellow light. The air was less an atmosphere than a kneaded, blended, infinitely various substance of song that rose up like a beautiful spirit over the land. It was disengaged from its medjums. Coming from the heart of Earth it flowed back and lay over Earth like an emanation. If there was the beautiful suggestion of a smile over the strong, dark face of Earth, it was largely because from her parted lips a song slowly circled upwards.

Indeed, the face that Eoghan O'Clery had seen—passionate, masterful and terrifying in a strength of purpose that was not cruelty but relentless foresight—a dark face with dark skin and dark eyes over full breasts—smiled now and was flushed with a nearer beauty.

Everywhere its appeal was felt. The fields stretched out over the land, full of busy toil; and the voices of women working at the land rose up in toned chants that glided between and over the notes of the airs they sang, rising and falling till the notes of their songs were only like the momentary resting places in large swaying monotones. There was great happiness in that singing, though it was a happiness coloured with a sorrow as old as Earth and as full of mystery. It was punctured by the voices of men or of women shouting to their dogs or their cattle.

Flocks of geese flew over the fields in patches of whiteness that caught the sunlight, and their voices mixed with the crowing of cocks and barking of dogs in the general bustle of domesticity. That domesticity was less a thing in itself than an echo of the larger happiness in which it was set: a sudden, noisy echo, that concluded with its expression where the larger happiness flowed on and continued and repeated and re-created itself in fold after fold beyond the senses, like the light flowing over the sea only to be known by some accident of wave and angle of sight.

The boundaries of that domestic joy could be known, and its heart of homeliness felt—except for some twists of songs the women sang, where an ancient sorrow toned. It was houselled and familiar. But the joy of Earth merged with distance, where a shadow of awe fell upon it. Those who ceased from their work in the fields were always conscious of it, and they rested for a brief moment on spade or shovel to look on the surrounding mountains. They continued their work again, and lost themselves in a continuous rhythm of bodily movement.

For Earth, stretched out now in loveliness, was not comprised in the scene that made the loveliness known, but pended over it. There was more than was seen, lying beyond the scene; and that furthermore seemed bodeful just as light stretching to infinity would seem opaque. Earth was lovely indeed; exquisite in the infinite modulations of colour, amazing in its breadth and strength of beauty, bewildering in the lights that shone about the whole, at times

indeed maddening in its woven garment of song and the new richly-woven garment that was being thrust out through the brown and purple soil; but there was always something beyond the visible beauty even because of the visible beauty. It was something that her menkind felt that day, even when they were perhaps not consciously alive to the visible beauty that was spread out under the glad light of the sun.

CHAPTER II.

As Tomas McLir came across the road from Islean to Bailawnach such was the scene that lay before him. He had just concluded a task at the other end of the island. He had been paid off in the morning, and spent his day leisurely making his way homeward, looking up old friends on his journey and attending to the needful refreshment that the earnings handy in his pocket made to seem so apposite. It was quite the happiest way to spend life: to conclude a task, to receive money, to walk the road, to see old friends and to drink with them. Even were it not for the spring day a man's cup would be full. With the spring day it brimmed and frothed over the edges bounteously.

As he came along the road running over the heath towards Barnaran he was a contented man. But there was more than contentment in him. There was more affection and ecstasy in him than he would have cared to own as his eye rested on the hills and fields of Earth. He looked on Earth as a son may look on his mother, loving her, proud and glad in her, yet more than half ashamed at the strength of his affection. The life pulsed from Earth to him in the one vein; and astonished him with joy till he defended himself against himself.

"Ach, 'tis the old man I am, and not the rising lath of a springy lad. I'd make the great lepper on the roads, now, so I would, with the stiffness that's on me. I've been too long working. Too long working, I have. 'Twould be a great dawn on the hills. Be damned now but I'll be abroad from dawn to down."

He went in to see Seumas, the smith, to ask him if he would come the following day to fish the streams with him. There was a large company in the house, sitting on the

benches round the three walls away from the forge. Some had come in with tasks to be done, and others had come because a company had gathered.

"*Go m-beannuigh Dia annso,*" he said, walking in and taking the seat the others shuffled up to make for him.

"*Go m-beannuigh Dia 'gus Muire dhuit,*" came a confused murmur around the house.

He sat quietly, taking no part in the conversation, but just watching each speaker. Then, as the evening came on and the company did not thin, he began to get restless and anxious to take the road home. He attempted a hint.

"They're after telling me you were up the brooks yesterday," he said to the smith.

"Myself?" said Seumas, stopping in his work. "I was not then."

He was looking directly at Tomas; and Tomas made the slightest movement of one eyelid.

"Ach, now," said Tomas, derisively, "let you not be talking."

"I was not, surely," said Seumas before he observed the flickered eyelid and took its significance. Then he added: "I didn't have any disposition to go that way with two years."

"Ach, now," Tomas said, still invitingly, "'tis easy to be talking. A person could very easy be talking."

"I hadn't the mind to be going, and I hadn't the heart to be going either," Seumas said. And he turned to his work again, and struck the iron he drew from the fire with a compressed passion. There was a significance in that passion that puzzled Tomas as he watched him attentively.

The sharp break in the conversation caused a silence for some time, broken only by the music of the smith's hammer on the iron and anvil.

"It's Eoghan O'Clery the great hero that went that's heart-struck him," said Paddy O'Dochertaigh.

Paddy was leaning forward looking cunningly at the smith; and Seumas turned sharply round, looked blackly at Paddy, and then turned to his work again; whacking at his iron angrily.

A sudden illumination came on Tomas as he remembered that Eoghan's cottage lay on the river; and he watched Seumas satirically as he spoiled his iron.

Then Seumas picked up the spoiled iron in his clutch and

flung it aside. He leaned forward to get another; but even as he did so he stopped. He stayed a moment with his hand outstretched; then straightened himself, and turned on Paddy.

"If I am now he's a lad would shift the wind you do be loosing from your tongue. It's Scotland. It's the lad you did be working beside. It's the stricken mother on him. It's the likely *seanchus* any *gasur* would be trying his invention on in a dirty barn, and any *amadan* would be tramping through a dirty winter for a sup of porter and a gusty laugh. Cannot you hold your whisht now, and leave the lad for them that have a decent recollection of him?"

The company laughed at his vehemence as he turned sullenly to the forge.

"Tell the story now," one said.

"Do now, Paddy!" said another.

But Paddy seemed rather overwhelmed by the smith's anger. His manner suggested that his natural eagerness had been somewhat scorched by that contempt and anger. He withdrew into himself, and his eyes looked restlessly around the company. His foxy face made him look hunted. The fact that he had always stood as a great admirer of Eoghan O'Clery's abashed him the more because he felt now as though he had lost his bearings. He felt this with a touch of indignation when Tomas intervened against his tale.

"Wait now. Wait now. Let the story go now. 'Tis better rested."

Seumas Clancy had recently come in. He had been drinking; and the porter had transformed him from a quiet, steady man to a man who persistently nursed some inward mirth, let it out in delighted chuckles as the porter bubbled up within him and made him see the sudden humour of the mad world, and tried to waken everybody to a conformity with that capricious, intensely humorous, inner world of his. He now intervened.

"Tell it, Paddy," he said. His eyes were heavy and dark, as he stood up and turned them on Paddy O'Dochertaigh; and his mouth twitched incessantly under his great moustache. His cap was in his hand, and his hair fell over his forehead. He looked rather magnificent. Magnificence seemed suddenly to be revealed in him. "Let you tell the story, Paddy, and damn the smith. Go on, lad. It's a good

story; a damned good story; and it's the devil of a true story. Tell it, boy." He turned to the smith. "Let you bid him tell the story. Why wouldn't he be telling the story? Damn you, why wouldn't he tell it?"

"He'll tell no story in my house," said the smith, banging at his iron.

Seumas Clancy looked on him, swaying as he stood. He laughed merrily, a small, uneven, catchy laugh, like a wheel with several cogs missing.

"Will he not so? It's myself then will be telling the story. It's the old one that came here, and his missis went from him worshipping in the mountains and talking with the good people, do you see? Worshipping the devil himself, mind you, surely. Blathering with the gentry. And the old lad—himself that was in it, do you see?—Michael O'Clery, God rest his soul and give him peace eternally, the decent man! He went worshipping the devil——"

"It wasn't himself went at all," some one cried out. "It was his missis, man!"

"Esht now! Isn't that what I'm after saying? Herself went to the good people, and himself went searching after her. Isn't that what I'm after saying? Isn't it now?"

"It is not. You were saying——"

"Let you rest now, all of you! Let you rest now, Seumas. It's enough; and I'll have no more, surely." The smith spoke with his work stayed in his hands. His voice was quiet, but his manner was menacing. His eyes, blood-shot from turf-smoke and black about the rims, glared at Seumas Clancy.

So Seumas Clancy also stood facing the smith with heavy, dreepy eyes, dark and deep, across which every now and again a smile of childish amusement flickered and disappeared. Most of the company bent forward to watch these two; but some of those present talked quietly among themselves.

"What way's that?" asked Seumas. "Who'll be hindering me now, be gob! Wasn't Michael Caol—himself that's gone now, God rest his soul—wasn't he Eugene in the old time? Wasn't he then? Isn't that with the old fellow in the story? What way wouldn't I tell it then? Didn't his missis disgrace him out of the school was at him with her necromancies—her necromancies—nec-ro-man-cies—and devilment? What way wouldn't I have the story so?"

There's devilment at yourself, or there's some one is the damned liar."

"The whole of you are damned liars, and damned meddling liars over and all," said the smith. He hung fire an instant; then flung his hammer at Seumas Clancy's feet, and Seumas nearly fell over in hopping to avoid it. "Stop it now, or let you all quit out of this!" he roared.

Seumas Clancy sniggered in great amusement; but, as he remembered his discomfort in hopping to avoid Seamus' hammer, the snigger ran, by crescendo, into a bubble of anger.

"Who the hell's yourself to be hurling to me?" he said, trying to gather himself together for a more effectual rage. "Damn it, haven't I the right to be saying what I will? Isn't it a tale that's passing through the place, and a likely tale, and a good tale too? Would you stop me now?"

"I would so, and I will," said the smith, whose anger had changed to incision. "If it's a tale going through the big world itself it's a tale will stop its shoes at this door. Heed me now. I'm wanting no crossed words with you, Seumas, but that's my way, and let you rest so."

"Rest, is it? With you hurling the hammer to me! Don't I know well the kind of man you are? If you're biding in the house now, and labouring at the forge now, you had the devilment one time. It's the way you'll not be hearing me now because there's acquaintance at you on the story."

Seumas Clancy assumed a bluster. The smith looked at him; then picked up the two bars that leant against the bench behind Seumas.

"Maybe so, and maybe not so. Are these with you, Seumas Clancy?" he said.

"Well, they are," said Seumas blinking at them, a memory of them puzzledly recurring to him.

The smith lifted them in his hand, and with a heave of his whole body hurled them through the door of the house. Then he turned to the forge again, and beckoned his assistant to resume work.

Seumas Clancy looked at him, at the place where the bars had been, and out through the door, in a pained attempt to understand in all its bearing the significance of this new retort.

"It's a damned unneighbourly thing now, so it is—damned unneighbourly thing," said he, and stumbled out.

“ ’Tis, Seumas,” said one, sympathetically; “ ’tis damned unneighbourly,” and out he went, while others followed him to show their sympathy with the sentiment. Some went because the broken conversation made a stay seem unnecessary, whereas the going of others made a departure seem opportune.

Tomas McLir waited, watching the smith, who was clearly disturbed. To Tomas, indeed, he seemed disturbed out of all proportion to the creating cause. It was rather a study in human nature to Tomas to watch him smiting at his irons, and he took great pleasure in such studies.

The smith finished the job he was at; hesitated a minute; then took up another; finished that; hesitated again; then took up yet another; stopped in the middle of it; looked as if he was about to fling it aside impatiently; and concluded by putting it apart deliberately and raking together the ashes over his fire. He told his assistant to be gone, and took off his apron.

The last of those who had remained went off at this. Tomas, however, sat where he was.

“ The people in this place is damned fools,” said the smith at last; “ a pack of gusty *amadain*, by the faith of my soul.”

“ Ach, it’ll take an *amadan* and a decent man to be making the whole part of a man. It will now. ’Tis the way things do always be; and ’tis a good way over and all. It couldn’t be any other way, so it couldn’t; and ’tis all one. Do you mind Micky Cullen? ”

“ Micky Sean? ” asked Seumas abstractedly.

“ Him itself. He was working the roof yesterday, and started to sing a grand sweet song of the olden times. There’s a lovely voice on Micky Sean, let you heed me now; and I stopped listening to him. ‘ What put you in the mind of that? ’ said I, going out to him. ‘ Do you hear that old fellow up in the sky? ’ says he. ‘ A person would be grand set-out to be singing the like of that little fellow, ’ says he. He’ll be drinking and roaring now. He’s likely been drinking and roaring the day gone. That’s the way it is: the very way now.”

The smith was silent as he stood in his doorway smoking his *duidin*. The dusk was setting outside; and a great quietness had settled over the fields, broken only by the tramp of a boot as some one passed along the road.

"It'd be a great day to be in the hills, or to be fishing the streams," said Tomas, pulling out his *duidin* again.

"I'll fish no brooks again, Tomas. The empty house beyond is a great heart-sore. I'm the queer fool, so I am, but I'd rather be looking on that red lad than my own fire. Now that's how it is."

Tomas laughed a short, satirical laugh, as he pushed the ember of his match into his pipe, and sucked hard to get the tobacco to light.

"It's a queer story Paddy has from the Donegal lad," he said.

"Well, it is now," the smith said quietly. "And it's a true story surely. That's not to say any *gasur* should be telling it. Are you heeding the trouble on Nancy Flaherty? See the way the schoolmaster does be all times walking up and down by the lake roaring out."

"Ach, a person should be heeding half he'd be hearing," said Tomas abruptly.

"He might be heeding the half of that itself, and the half of that again, and there'd be great matter reddled out yet. Didn't the inspector come to see him in his school, there was that bother made?"

"Did he, or didn't he, it's all one," said Tomas.

"What way would a man who didn't take but the sups till he was married be put home by the lads continual now? There's some men a person wouldn't be crossing. There's ways with them."

Tomas McLir took the *duidin* from his mouth, and, under the pretence of ramming the tobacco down with his thumb, he scrutinised the smith closely through the dusk. As Seumas was standing in the doorway, darkly outlined against the one complete blueness of field and sky, this was not difficult. But he made no answer. Seumas had expressed a thought too often with himself for him to be able to say anything to it.

"That lad that's away—there's more on him than he'd rightly know himself, I'm thinking," the smith continued reflectively. "Likely it's forbidden, right enough. There's no saying anyway. It's a queer story about the mother he had. It wasn't from his father surely. Michael was only the learned kind of a man. There's acquaintance and there's acquaintance. There's different kinds. Maybe a person would be rightly leaving it by. But there's no

saying. I'd be glad seeing him back, if it's only to be knowing rightly. But I'll fish no more brooks, mind you." He fell into reflection.

"I'll be taking the road," said Tomas rising. He did not like the subject. It took him out of his satirical depth; and was yet most near him.

"Good-night to you!" said the smith, shutting the door of the forge.

"Good-night now," said Tomas, striding towards the road.

CHAPTER III.

THE fair was over. Eoghan O'Clery had early bought all the cattle and sheep he was in need of, retiring when he felt prices hardening against him. He had collected his purchases, fed and trucked them at the station, and he walked through the scattered remains of the fair under a warm evening sky that glowed over the darkening land. All that day, beneath all its business, his mind had been intent on one thing; he had been intent on one thing for months past, fascinated by it rather than desiring it, and he took it up now like a man turning into his natural stride.

It is more than likely that it was this very intentness that partly withdrew him so early from the buyers, yet he had bought as much as he had thought to do, and he knew there would be no criticisms from Mullingar. He had watched backward fairs for over a year now, and in that time had successfully resisted all attempts to reduce him to what the man from Mullingar called proper discipline, but what he recognised as bondage. Or rather, he did not recognise it as anything: it simply struck across the grain of his impulse, and he just as simply turned away from it. Twice he had surrendered his working agreement under criticism; and twice, after varied delays, the man from Mullingar had returned to him; with the result that he felt himself free from criticism.

He knew that the price of his hire was out of all proportion to the service he gave, or such a state of affairs would not have been possible. But it satisfied him. Moreover, it seemed the best he could get. And certainly it was a

great deal better than the infamous conditions under which he had worked at the potato harvest in Scotland.

The first year of his absence from Maolan had been a term of agony, intolerable but for the deadness to which it had reduced him: a deadness that found its outward picture in the squalor and indecency with which he and a number of labourers from various parts of Ireland had been herded together at the harvest. The enforced companionship, moreover, helped repression, and fortified him against himself by fortifying him against others.

When the gangs broke up, the excitement for the first time thoroughly aroused him. It had been his intention to return to Maolan. He had begun to want the mountains there with a terrible passion, with a thirst that subdued all his thinking till he became less a man than an absorbing desire. When the time came he found it impossible. Had Nancy's house not lain between him and his own place it might have been possible; but he recoiled at the thought of passing it. It lay like a barrier between him and his desire, and he fell away from it with a numbed feeling in his mind.

Moreover, there had been another cause that kept him away, and that finally drew him into an overpowering pursuit. Overturning his bundle of clothes at the end of harvest, he came across the packet of letters he had always carried about with him.

He read them now. He no longer held them away from himself reverentially. He lay one night in the barn by himself, on the bunch of straw on which he usually slept, and by candle-light he read through all of them. The following day he returned to Ireland, and at night he read them all again in a cheap lodging-house in Dublin off the quays.

Uncertain where to go or what to do, these letters gave an added distress to his mind. Not that they told him much more than he already knew. Though he had always thought of himself as knowing nothing of his father's early life, yet in fact his mind was weighted with its implications; and the letters only made him definitely aware of things he had rather avoided thinking upon hitherto.

Their effect on his mind was confused because the sequence in which he read them represented no sequence at all in time or happening. The letters were mostly from a young woman

who signed herself "Sheila" to a man whom she addressed as Eugene. When Eoghan read them first he did not at once think of the writer in any relation to himself; but slowly the thought came drifting through every channel of his mind that she was his mother—the mother he remembered only as some woman who held at some time the position of "woman of the house" to his father. It was a very obvious conclusion, truly enough. The letters were clearly written to his father, and made reference to his scholarship and school. There were also letters that he knew to be written by his father though they were always signed "Eoghan." Yet, partly because of their remoteness from him, and partly because of his reluctance to come near to them, it was some time before he realised the full purport of what he was reading; and when he realised it he felt like a man walking in a mist. All thought of returning to Maolan was forgotten; Maolan itself was forgotten; and he drifted out of Dublin, walking westward with no fixed resolve in his mind and no desire for resolution.

It was a curious story the letters unfolded. His father's passion depended not on "Sheila's" beauty (though the letters were full of extravagant and customary praises of her beauty), but on her untutored wildness—a wildness which he yet sought to tutor and "put learning on." Yet it was not passion. Through all the laboured artifice and sudden beauty of phrase it was plain even to Eoghan—who was not naturally critical, and who shrank from any hint of criticism in this—that he was fascinated against his will. He seemed to struggle against it. There had been opposition to the match; and one brief letter stated his acceptance of that decision. His mind struggled against its fascination; but the fascination prevailed; and it prevailed apparently because of the tempest of passion that swayed through the illiteracy of the letters that came to him.

These formed the bulk of the bundle. As Eoghan read them he thrilled to them. They played on him as a storm plays music on waters. He stumbled at their incoherence first; he felt some of his father in his veins putting out a difficult first resistance: but they caught him at last; and he read and re-read them with an answering music in his mind. A kindred spirit seemed to reach through time in them, and speak loudly in his mind. He puzzled greatly over them as he went his way, drifting

northward through bleak and bitter weather. Knowing his father, the passion these letters displayed was to him altogether disproportionate—even madly disproportionate. His father seemed, altogether without an adequate cause, to have awakened a storm that swept him away. At times it appeared that the writer of these letters wished only to protect his father by her greater strength—if there was also the thought that the greater strength was first to be used in a speed of capture and envelopment. Always the passion was disembodied: the very liberties of expression were lighted by a purity that made them and illumined them to more than themselves.

All these were the letters of lovers. But there was one in the bundle of a different kind. It was the only letter of them all that was dated; and it was written in his own fifth year to a husband that had disappeared. It was bitter; it was poignant; and the writer was in want and destitute. The passion had gone, and with it the illiteracy and incoherence; but there was a wild cry in it for her child—quaintly mixed though it was with the challenge of a woman's independence—that haunted him as he drifted along the deserted, storm-stricken January roads.

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER Sliabh Gullion he met one night the hazard that put him on his new way. He had taken shelter at mid-day from a fierce storm of snow driving from the east; and when at night the man of the house returned he was allotted the portion of smoking his pipe in a corner of the old fireplace and listening to a long chant of a complaint against a certain Joseph Byrne, who, it appeared, had driven a hard deal against his host, and had just won a law-suit for non-fulfilment of his conditions. Eoghan sat near the fire, letting its heat strike against the side of his body with a rich ease; and at first he paid little heed to the man of the house. To be sure, a generally sympathetic silence seemed to be more satisfactory all round than such a close attention as would have involved questioning and interruption. The attitude of the woman of the house indicated so much; and she was

qualified to judge. So Eoghan's quietude attuned with the occasion. But at last he aroused himself.

"A cattle-dealer, is he?" he asked.

"Certainly so," the man of the house replied indignantly, and pursued his tale.

Eoghan folded his silence around him once more, but it was now woven of his own thoughts.

"Mullingar, is it?" he asked.

"What's that?" asked the man of the house irritably.

"Himself you're speaking of."

"Certainly he is. Wasn't I saying that now?"

He looked angry, and his wife looked crossly at Eoghan as though wondering at her wisdom in urging him to stay in shelter with them for the night. So Eoghan said no more, but let the man of the house chant his complaint to the distant bitter end—which came with unexpected abruptness when the man of the house took his sorrows with him to his bed.

The next morning Eoghan went to see if this were the Joseph Byrne he had met before; with the result that he undertook to watch distant and backward fairs under instructions from Mullingar.

His work interested him at first, and aroused his slumbering will; yet all the while the letters sang in his mind. Finally, and quite imperceptibly, the two things coalesced, and flowed in one stream together. The choice of the fairs lay largely under his own advice, and they began to lead in the direction of Donegal. Without his knowing that he had taken any resolve to do so, his days became as hours in the pursuit to search out whether his mother were living, or at least to discover the scenes in which those letters were written, and with which they dealt.

So he kept his mind away from Maolan. So he overmastered the pain that continually gnawed at him by a pursuit that caught up all his energies. Often the pursuit seemed to him an idle and thriftless thing; and for weeks he would drift onward—or, more truly, eddy in a succession of exactly similar weeks—with a suspended will, and a passion so flaccid that it seemed only a dull ache. He hungered for the mountains he knew. The hills and mountains of the counties he traversed gave him pleasure rather than satisfaction. They were like new friends that chiefly reminded of the absence of the old. He would sit among

them often, rapt and still for hours; but he was a stranger among them; he did not know their moods; and so the awe that they in their majesty aroused had no trembling edge of familiarity, their strength had not the intimacy that turns terror to the purest of joy.

So, for weeks together, the forbidden companionship worked in him like a frustrated passion. It turned him astray from all the purposes of his life. It found him after fairs in the hands of the peelers drunk and lusty for fight, taking five to cope with him, and the three survivors to hold him. It saw him running over hills like a demented man, moaning to himself. It saw him walking, for ever walking, from choice walking from fair to fair wherever possible; nor merely avoiding, but uncouthly shunning, the company of men, save when whiskey made his company among them rather an excessive pleasure. Yet it never lost him his dignity. It even increased it; so that, even if he had a weight of liquor in him, and was turbulent, none took liberties with him, and many had a curious repugnance stirred in them by seeing him in the common hands of peelers.

Strangely, he never thought of Nancy. Possibly his mind avoided the arousal of that memory as the hand will circle about a bruise on the body. The memory of excessive pain maybe had set up an inhibition. It was not that the fire had burned the fuel to ashes; for whenever his hunger for Maolan made him turn on himself angrily to ask why it was that he did not return, then the thought of Nancy rose suddenly up. It was only then that she found him out. He saw her sharply and clearly in visual image: never ideally, but always in one or other of the ways in which he had seen her before. Sometimes she would be beneath him in the darkness of night. Sometimes she would be before him, all the colours of her clothes bleached by moonlight. Sometimes he would see her in a quiet evening light, very beautiful to him, and set as he would have her set. Yet the image he dreaded most was when she had thrust her face towards him, as he had seen her with difficulty through his mask, pleading to know if it were or were not he who had danced with her in that last mad dance.

The one thing that gave him lines upon which to run was his new found quest. To that he always reverted, as to a road the end of which he did not know but the security of which he trusted. He chose fair after fair that took him

nearer, and then round about, the region of country where he hoped to find some traces. He questioned and conversed, all with a view to getting some piece of information that would start him on his way. He was eager and keen. He thought himself afflicted by his mother's letters. It was true: he was. Yet he did not know that the quest itself had now become a pursuit in which he kept his attention on his end in view not least because he did not wish it to wander through the pain of other things.

CHAPTER V.

So he now resumed his pursuit with the cessation of other affairs. An old man that morning, on hearing that the name of his bargainer was Eoghan O'Clery, had quizzed him closely and said:

"There's a spit in you, ah, and two spits, lad, of an Eoghan O'Clery I was acquainted with in olden times. But likely you'd be of the same breed, though I'm not acquainted with yourself."

He had parted from Eoghan with dignity; and Eoghan had parted from him with equal calm, though in fact his mood had been far otherwise. At first, being concerned with other things, he had not gathered the full significance of the remark the old man had stopped a moment to make; and when he did so the old man was already nodding to him before passing on. He even thought to have gone after him, and while he was deciding it was too late.

Now he searched among the people for him. He wished he had bought the old man's cattle, for thus he would have met him again without this seemingly fruitless labour.

Twilight fell through the air like the unfoldings of curtains that surged noiselessly to and fro, and it was dark before he gave over his quest. He felt exasperated.

He had searched so long that to have come now right upon his trail, for it at last to escape his sight thus, was enough to send him, as it did, ruffled and irritated to his lodging. As he took his supper he asked the man of the house if he knew who the farmer was, and was further irritated to discover how little he could describe him. He thought he knew him well, but such details as would have

differentiated him from other old finely-featured, shrewd bargainers, escaped him when he came to them.

"Likely it was old Tom O'Rian," the man of the house suggested. "He's a stranger to this part of the country. It was his grandfather came this way first."

His wife suggested, however, that it might be Patsy O'Dochertaigh, who apparently equally fulfilled the conditions. And then the two of them began to search out all the old men within twenty miles who answered the description.

"A thin man, you say he was?" asked the man of the house.

"He was, then," answered Eoghan, wondering for the first time in his life at exactly what stage thinness in men ceased to be aptly so described.

"Would he have the one eye wandering over your shoulder while the eye would be occupied watching yourself?"

"He was not that sort of a man surely."

"The two eyes of him would be rightly fixed in his attentions?"

"That was so," said Eoghan, with an accurate memory of the close sudden scrutiny he had received.

"It wouldn't be the Greasuidhe Ruadh so," he said to his wife.

"There's no saying who he would be. Were you wanting the old lad for anything that might be important?"

Eoghan did not reply. He lit his pipe again vexedly, and drew on it hard for a few minutes before letting it die away.

The man of the house resumed with his wife the discussion as to whom the description given might best fit; and so the subject continued for some time on a gradual diminuendo with lengthening silences. So it died its natural death without Eoghan's interest to enliven or sustain it. And as it died the conversation died, till it was renewed by the introduction of other more natural matters in which the man of the house managed at last to catch Eoghan's attention. They spoke of the prices lately ruling at fairs. They passed, by the easy stages of pleasant conversation, to the prospects of local farming; of tillage, herding, labour and economic holding. So they went to the holders of land. the size of the holdings, the age from which they came, and the skill with which they were worked. And so they arrived

at names and personalities, and to the fringe of history with which in Ireland all life is immediately involved.

"You'll be from this part of the country yourself, it is very likely indeed," said the man of the house.

"I am not," said Eoghan. "I'm from Maolan."

"That's a wild part now, and a hardy part. I shouldn't wonder it was hardier than this part of the country."

"It's hardy enough; and over-hardy. "It's a coarse place for fishing. 'Tis mainly rock, where it wouldn't take but the spade. And there's little but heath for cattle or sheep. But 'tisn't too bad at all," he added, as though to be caught speaking in deprecation of his part of Earth to a stranger was a stumble in dignity and decency. "It's a great place now, where the sea is always in the air, singing or sounding, and the hills to be standing round about."

"I was thinking you were aptly from this part. You have the great look on you of the O'Clerys that have the habit of this country."

"Is that so?" said Eoghan.

"That is so. There's many of them yet in it. There's some that say they never were out of it, that they were residing in it from the beginning of all times. There was one time a man of them here—a greatly learned man he was—and he did be often saying there was many of them swept out of it the time the English Cromwell afflicted the country; but that many of them held fast with the land. Wouldn't it be a great wonder didn't they, the creatures, withered and perished through the country the way they were by that hell's tyrant? Eoghan O'Clery—that was the very name with him. Eugene or Eoghan, 'tis all one, I believe, though I'm no learned man myself. There was all times a Eugene O'Clery in it. And there's the same kind of a manner with yourself, and the name and all. That put me in the mind of that one."

"Was that one a schoolmaster?"

"He was then. He was a learned man moreover. It's the way it was he was learned in many things that wouldn't be designedly in the road of his teaching the childer. He was a grand man, that one; full of history and old tales, he was; but he was middling misfortunate."

"Was he living in this place?"

"He was surely. It wasn't two miles from this very house—not two miles."

"It was my father likely."

"Is that so?"

The man of the house fumbled in his pocket for his tobacco, and Eoghan passed him a lump of twist, from which he cut a pipe-full. The man of the house lit his pipe, and passed Eoghan the lit match. They both smoked for some time in an easy silence.

Yet there was a touch of diffidence in the atmosphere. They had slid naturally into the discovery—or, rather, the discovery had slid easily between them—and they both desired a little time to adjust themselves to it. The silence was easy, though watchful and tentative. Neither looked at the other as they smoked. It was only the woman of the house who watched Eoghan closely.

"Yourself was brought from this place then," said the man of the house in passing comment, with the air of a man who did not wish to intrude in a private matter.

"There's no recollection of that time with me," said Eoghan.

"Ah, there wouldn't be," said the man of the house.

Silence fell about them again. Though Eoghan was the one who wished to talk, desiring the information he sought, yet it was he who was held most fast in that silence. It clothed him more naturally. Curiosity began to be awake in the man of the house, who looked up at his wife and signalled to her with his eyes.

She rose up, and went out of the house, returning after a time with a bottle of whiskey. He looked at the bottle with surprise, for it was porter he had intended; but there was welcome in his surprise.

"It's yourself that should be welcome, and you returning to the place where the world first held you by surprise," he said, pouring Eoghan a glass of whiskey.

"*Go raibh mile maith agad,*" said Eoghan, taking the glass and drinking. "Maybe you're remembering the old one."

"I do then; and well. I saw yourself that time there-over, there's no doubt of that, though I misremember what kind you were. I was away to Dublin since. I was married at Dublin."

"He's dead now, God rest him! He's dead now with two years."

"Amen! He was a decent man, but a middling hard

man thereover. Hard in his ways, he was, like a man would be who had a great notion of the things should be attached to us in this country. He was all times chastising and catechising the people's simplicity. Many a time they were hurted by him. But he was misfortunate, and maybe a person didn't be remembering that the way they had a right. Maybe we didn't itself, for he was misfortunate surely."

The glow of the whiskey was in Eoghan's veins, with the result that his eagerness for information rose to the surface of his mind, and flowed off into conversation.

"He never did be speaking of those times," he said. "There's little knowledge with me of the things a person should know of himself surely."

"Is that so? Well, now, there are some who will always be putting the hand to their hurts, and there are some who will put their hurts away from them. It's all in the way a person was made. Some were designed for the one way, and some were designed for the other way, and it's all one in the end. Himself was a middling hard sort of a man."

"He was certainly so. I was never apt for the learning he was wishful and hopeful to put on me."

"He wouldn't be liking that surely. He did never cherish the people's simplicity. It was like a priest he was; and, by crimes, his reverence himself took a scolding an odd time, he was that severe. Great books he had he bought from Dublin. They were books written by his forefathers, I believe. It was so he used to tell us. All about the greatness and the history and the ancient times of Ireland. A man would be destroyed reading them. He was a greatly learned man sure enough, was Master O'Clery. A greatly learned man. A very knowledgeable and conversable man. He didn't have time to be attending to the world, and that was the way misfortune came to him. That was how I was always thinking. But there was great parties and factions at that time."

The eagerness in Eoghan's mind was now proving an obstruction. He did not know how to get to his point.

"Ah!" he said. "I have the books yet. He was living in Maolan."

"He went sudden," said the man of the house, going lightly awhile. "There's many living in this place had his instruction put on them, and they young *gasurs* at that time."

My brother Michael was learning with him. He's in America now. He wrote a letter one time saying there were societies there given to the learning Master O'Clery practised. You wouldn't think that now. A person would never know what things would be furninst him, and he in no admiration of them at all. That's so surely. We'd heed many a thing if we only known what another person would know, or what ourselves might know at another time. I was agin Master O'Clery then. It was myself brought Michael away from him."

The man of the house was like a man into whose mind the past was flowing as his brain slowly gave up its memories piece by piece. But he was suddenly aroused by an unnecessarily energetic question from Eoghan.

"Is my mother living in this place?"

The man of the house was jolted. He looked sharply at Eoghan, and back again at the fire, before he recovered the dignity necessary to answer such a question.

"She went to the Union the time Master O'Clery left her. She was strange in her ways. There were people shaking their tongues at her. She went away in her mind. I haven't heard of her many years now surely. She went wild in her life after Master left her, and there's some were saying in those bygone days she was distressed and destroyed with the good people at that time, which was the cause Master O'Clery went travelling. But there are no such things, I believe. It's only old people's talk. I never saw such things. They put her up in the Union she was all that abandoned. Indeed she was abandoned. But it's all an old story. There's none ever speaking of it now."

"In what Union does she be now?" asked Eoghan, fast in his pursuit now.

"Ah, she's not in the Union at all."

"Isn't she living yet?"

"She is, of course. They put her in the Asylum. In the County Asylum she does be, to the best of my belief."

"She's living yet?"

"Certainly she is."

"Was she wanting, the time she was left?"

"How wouldn't she be? She had a great custom before that time of going into the hills. The Master did often be saying yourself would be crying and roaring out in the nights wanting her, and yourself a baby. It was that put the evil

name on her. Well now, after that time she did be all times in the hills, living on what the neighbours would be giving her an odd time, till they put her to the Union. That's how she was. It was a shame the Master to be leaving her; but thereover she put great vexation on him."

"It was in this place he was living?"

"In this very place. There's little change in it since, mind you, saving the times are changed."

"Are there many of his kindred living in it?"

"O'Clerys, is it? A mist wouldn't be fuller of wetness. They were never out of it, man dear, by all that's telling."

"Was it them that put her away?"

"It was. It was his people, she bearing their name and shaming it. It was his cousin, Colm O'Clery."

"Wouldn't she have kindred of her own? Aren't there any of them living in it?"

"There was only the mother and herself when the Master married her, I believe. But she didn't come from these parts. She was an O'Neill, and came out of Tyrone. It was said she went ailing and died the time the Master left his missis; but maybe that was only talking. There was a lot of talking at that occasion. Factions and parties there was. But there's none at all speaking of it now. There isn't one that's speaking of it."

CHAPTER VI.

FORTIFIED with further talk with the man of the house, Eoghan went the following morning to search out Colm O'Clery at his farm some eight miles away. He found him at work in the sunlit fields—a tall man with a kindly smile, remarkably like his father save for his stature and a boldness of feature through which the underlying delicacy displayed itself. He noticed the man more closely than was customary, being arrested by the likeness to his father; and he did not notice that he himself was closely like the man, of the same height moreover. There was a short, swarthy man working with Colm O'Clery, with a bright, flushed cheek; and he did not hear what this man said to Colm O'Clery as he strode over the potato furrows.

“Esht, Colm, here’s the spit of you lepping the ditch, and you slipping backward in the years. If that lad’s no relation of yours I’ve a gallon of porter staring me in the face.” And he wiped the sweat off his forehead and wrung it over the land.

“*Go m-beannaigh Dia dhuit,*” said Eoghan, coming over the field.

“*Is Muire dhuit,*” said Colm O’Clery, surveying him as he came.

Each of them quickly and closely scanned the other, and then looked over the fields.

“It’s a grand day now,” said Eoghan.

“It is,” said the other. “It’s grand weather altogether, thanks be to the Almighty God.”

“There’s grand potatoes with you. They’re early now.”

“Well, this is a good gleann for the spuds, and they bees early. Early potatoes is a great blessing,” he said, picking up one and breaking it open, “if they haven’t the taste itself. They aren’t too bad at all, I thank God.”

“They’re good and clean and weighty,” said Eoghan, looking over the ridges on which the potatoes lay.

“Ah, it’ll be a good year for the early spuds, it will. I doubt it will be too dry for the late ones, let you mind me. Were you coming to the fair?”

“I was. It was a bad fair.”

Colm O’Clery looked at Eoghan for a moment.

“The badness and the goodness of fairs is in the person itself surely,” he said. “It was a good fair for them that had a mind to be selling. Good enough, thank God, for the quiet time of the year.”

“That’s sure for you now,” said Eoghan, marvelling a little at his changed standpoint so suddenly revealed to himself.

So the conversation went according to the leisured ritual, each wondering at the other, but each too courteous to step rudely to the business in a haste that would at once have broken them apart and frustrated any understanding; until at last Colm O’Clery, taking advantage of a chance remark by Eoghan, led the way lightly and easily.

They had been discussing crops, and Eoghan had given an opinion with which Colm O’Clery disagreed.

“It couldn’t be done so. It’s hard land beyond: it’s clay that you’d need to be turning with a loy. There’s no bog

in that; and little gravel either. But you'll be strange to this land."

"Troth I am," said Eoghan. "But I doubt my seed came from this place by the token that my name's O'Clery."

"So it would be," Colm O'Clery assented. "The O'Clery's of this place had always the great resemblance put on them by the disposition of Almighty God!"

"The old fellow was a schoolmaster forninst here."

"Why wouldn't he be?" said Colm O'Clery, temporising.

"He'd the same name as myself; and Eoghan's the name with me."

Colm O'Clery looked round sharply at him, and his companion looked up from his digging. Then Colm O'Clery put out his hand.

"You're heartily welcome, so you are," he said. His manner glowed of a sudden, after an intercalary watchfulness; the dignity of a stranger dropped off him, and at once the relationship between the two passed into another continent altogether. They shook hands to signify that fact; and now it was Eoghan who was the more reserved and watchful of the two. "I'm a cousin of the Master's, do you know?"

"I'm acquainted with that," said Eoghan.

"Tell me now, how's the old lad, and where does he be?"

"He's dead."

"Do you tell me so? Well, he went west, did he? God rest his soul! It's a call will be coming to all of us, and there's no gainsaying it, there's not. It'd be a wise man that's not put out about it, and it's wise in them that's left to take it easy and to be putting up a decent prayer an odd time for the rest of his soul. That's my house beyond, and you'd a right to be coming with me."

Colm O'Clery led the way toward the road; and Eoghan followed by his side. He did not want to go. He shrank from meeting a number of people who might accept relationship with him, but whom he knew not, and whom he had no wish to know. A sudden great hunger for Maolan, for its mountains and its people, assailed him with almost physical craving.

"You didn't take your dinner yet?" Colm O'Clery said with great friendliness.

"Sure I didn't," Eoghan said.

"We'll be taking some of them new spuds, and you'll see what I'm meaning about the land maybe," said Colm O'Clery, making conversation. "What place was himself living in the time he went west?"

"In Maolan."

"That's a hard place, I shouldn't wonder. But he was a hard man, Eoghan O'Clery was; and he'd be apt to take to a strange part, being crossed and all as he was. May the Almighty God give him peace now! A person would be wanting a good holiday after the labours of this world: a fortnight's holiday for a day's work, every bit of it. I'm recollecting you well, *a mhic o*, the gasur you were that time. You'd the same red hair with you then, less than the whiskers. Be jabbers, but there's the queer thoughts with a person to be regarding you now. May I never see again but it's the mighty transmogrification—the mightiest transmogrification. It's queer the thoughts that come into the mind. It's a baby one minute, roaring out in the house; and esht, it's a big stretch of a man with an O'Clery's face looking out of the red whiskers. A person would be misdoubting the look of the hill standing before him, or the daylight itself, so he would, so he would, in troth. But you're heartily welcome, lad; there's no man welcomer than yourself, *a mhic o*." He stood opposite Eoghan, and again shook hands. "I'm kind of put about, lad. Let you not be heeding me."

He seemed disturbed. He became more and more disturbed as he continued speaking; and Eoghan's apparent coldness seemed to make him painfully aware of his failure in dignity. He endeavoured, palpably endeavoured, to put a check on himself as they walked up the road toward his cottage on the hillside.

To Eoghan's relief, there was only a daughter to attend them; and she, when she saw a stranger, did not sit with them. He sat and plucked at the potatoes in the silence that had come now upon Colm O'Clery. The occupation of the two men's minds made a strange contrast. It may be said Colm O'Clery's mind was loaded at every point with human emotion, whereas Eoghan's mind had been stripped of all loads in an unhuman preoccupation. Colm O'Clery's mind ranged over the years in a puzzling confusion, almost as if someone had played him a trick and upheaved their proper

order; whereas Eoghan was simply unaware of anything but the next step to be taken on his road. Colm O'Clery was unstrung, like a man who had been put astray of his road: Eoghan was tense like a man who ran a race. So it was that they sat at the board, and ate their potatoes, each man for a quite different reason much slower than usual in converting the meal into a mound of skins on his plate. Albeit Eoghan took his tea with his potatoes in a manner usual, whereas Colm O'Clery neglected his tea altogether.

Therefore, Eoghan's question, although very proper to the occupation of his mind, was almost like an outrage to Colm O'Clery.

"Is it true my mother's at the Asylum presently?"

"She is; oh, she is now," said Colm O'Clery when he had recovered and focussed his attention.

"What way would a person best get to see her?"

"Oh, you'd ask, you would. You'd ask. You'd just be going there and asking would they let you see her."

"Is she badly?"

"Bad enough; bad enough. She was going wild, disgracing everybody, living on what a person would give her. It was easy getting her put to the Asylum. Talking of queer people a person would never see. Ach, she was a bad business for Eoghan O'Clery, she was. I was right opposing the match he made, though I never knew till after the penalties she put on him, sweeping the scholars from his house, and driving him away in the darkness of the night."

"If I went to the station would I get there to-night?"

"You would, of course. Easy."

"Would I be wanting permission from yourself?"

"What way would you want permission from myself?"

"Wasn't it yourself put her away?"

"Ach, that's years gone." He stopped a minute and stared at Eoghan. "By jabers, would you think it now?—it's twenty years gone; faith, and twenty-three years gone; and twenty-four; and maybe more itself. It's queer: I'm all twisted in my thinking with looking at you sitting furninst me. But them are all things that's been put away."

"I won't be needing any token to take from yourself?"

"You would not. Certainly you wouldn't."

"I'll be stirring so."

Eoghan arose, and pressed down the tobacco in his pipe preparatory to going out. Colm O'Clery looked up

astonished at him. He had been preparing himself for a talk.

"You'll not be going now," he said, protesting.

Eoghan said nothing, but as he stood there, there was clear resolution in his mien.

"A *mhic*," Colm O'Clery said, rising slowly, and grumbling, "the time's lengthy yet."

"I'll be going to see my mother," Eoghan said.

That collected all Colm O'Clery's thoughts to a sharp focus, and he looked quickly and, for an instant, closely at Eoghan. Words were upon his lips, but he said nothing, and led the way out into the sunlight. Either he thought so much the less of Eoghan, or was taken so far beyond his depth by him (which things in truth are really one), that he considered words unnecessary. His manner was dignified and reserved again as they walked down the road. The conversation was scant, and general. Their demeanour was again that of strangers, watchful of each other. It was only when they came to part that, with a passing glow of warmth, he urged Eoghan to return after his visit; and Eoghan, half-aware of what was urged on him, agreed to do so.

So Eoghan was going down the road when he heard someone shouting after him. In the blur of his mind, through which only one thing shone distinctly, it was some time before he became aware of it; and he turned to see Colm O'Clery waving to him. He went back to meet him.

The dignity had dropped from Colm O'Clery's face and manner, and sharp anxiety reigned there instead.

"Esht lad," he said, as they met, "let you not be letting on you're a son of her."

Eoghan simply looked at him, not understanding.

"They'll be putting you into the expense of her keep so."

"Likely they would," said Eoghan.

"Ah, would they?" Colm O'Clery said. "Troth, lad, it's a Government there's not a soul of us loving. 'Tis a Government we had a right to be hating. Let it take now what it's wanting, and have the expense and welcome. Let it, lad. Let it step that road the way it will, and let you be easy about yourself, a *mhic o*. Let on the name with you's Burke: Seumas Burke. The Burkes is a Galway people."

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning Eoghan went up the sultry heat of the tumbled streets with a sultry heat of excitement burning in his veins, and presented himself at the County Asylum. Still thinking he needed some manner of introduction, he announced himself as coming from Colm O'Clery; but there was little need for formality.

"Old Sheila, is it? Ah, come in," said the porter; and at once led him to a nurse. "Here's one to see old Sheila," he announced. "Will you see to him, nurse?" he said, and walked away amicably.

So he was shown into a little room with bare high walls, where a woman sat with a brown shawl pulled over her head close beside a turf fire, despite the sun that shone brightly into the room.

"Here's someone to see you, Sheila," the nurse announced. "Be easy and natural with her," she whispered to Eoghan. "She's not often saying a great deal, and she has some queer ideas; and anyway don't take any nonsense from her." And she went out, leaving mother and son together.

Eoghan stood in the centre of the room looking down at the woman, who had not taken any notice of his entry. There was no longer any excitement in him. A strange feeling of something habitual came over him. The strong sense of being with his own, where diffidence was neither necessary nor desirable, held fast hold of him.

"Well, now!" he said roughly.

The woman lifted her face and looked keenly at him. There was no sign of a flagging will in that face. The very signs of age were rather those of a decayed than a depleted vitality. The flesh hung heavily on a broad, strong face, in which there were yet the signs of a beauty that had been. The eyes were blue, but so dark as to seem like dull coals against her pallid skin. Her hair was black yet, but showed dulled and lustreless as her shawl fell back with the jerk upward of her head. Her hands were clasped before her, with her elbows on her knees. The expression of her face was bitter as she looked long and steadily at Eoghan. Her glance scanned every feature of his.

"Is it yourself that's come?" she said. "You were long coming." And her head fell back again between her shoulders, and she bent again over the fire.

Eoghan stood for a moment looking at her.

"Let you not be complaining," he said then, sharply, and drew up his chair and sat opposite her stool.

There was but the grate fire, and thus there was little heat thrown into the room to add to the sultry heat of the day. Yet Sheila O'Clery sat bent beside it; and Eoghan sat stiffly opposite her. Nigh half an hour passed before they spoke, during which time neither of them so much as stirred.

"What way's yourself?" Eoghan then said. It was a strange thing for him to be making conversation; but she thrust him to it.

"What way would any person be, fast-bound in this place and they calling me without?" she said without looking up at him.

"That is so," he said.

"You would know that well, surely," she said, looking up for a moment cunningly at him, "if there's no lying word in your eye, and if I didn't be making blessings over you to some good purpose in the times that are gone by. Ach," she continued, her head dropping down again and her voice droning and wailing, "there's never the lying word at the eyes for them that has a sight to see. What's to be seen will be there surely, crossed or convenient. I haven't wished vainly, there's that much comfort to me. Ach," she said again, her head uplifted and her eyes staring past his shoulder wildly, "may you never hear them calling, and you fast-bound by the bloody hardship of men." Her eyes, curiously keen despite their vague dullness, shifted to his face, and scrutinised him again. "But you'll want, I doubt: I doubt you'll want: but it won't be walls will hold you, but a heaviness only. There's a thing agin you, lad. There was a thing agin himself, but I wasn't knowing it, not getting the knowledge with me till after."

Old Sheila spoke in a droning, complaining way, with a song of sorrow, age-old sorrow, in her voice. Every now and again it was caught, as it were, into a knot of bitterness, and that relieved the hopelessness that would otherwise have saturated it. It was like an incantation swelling at whiles to anger; and Eoghan, despite himself, felt a superstitious fear passing over him like waves of coldness.

"When did himself go westward?" she asked then, suddenly.

"Last Christmas was two years," he said.

"My curse to him," she said.

"Let you stop now," he said roughly, angrily; and he added: "May God rest him, and may He be blessing him," as though to counteract the curse.

She looked at him with withering contempt.

"You to be talking," she said, "that should know a thing better! There's cursing and there's blessing; there's the cursing that withers, and there's the blessing that heals; but them that has gone westward has to be taking what they paid for, and there's no blessing nor cursing can reach that far, nor nothing to alter. What's rooted in this place will be flowering in that place—that's not so far neither; and all the rest is words."

She continued muttering to herself derisively over the fire, and Eoghan heard her repeating his prayer to herself scornfully. He was about to interrupt her angrily; but the thought that she had been sitting there thinking and muttering during the better part of his own lifetime came to him violently and checked the words upon his lips. It drove him within and shut him fast about with silence, and gave her the lead in all that was to be said.

As if a fountain was opening within her she began to claim that lead. She lifted herself with a new arousal of energy, and looked steadily at him, till he began to feel discomfort at her attentive scrutiny, and almost, as by a forcible effort, pulled his eyes away from the hold of her glance and looked uneasily upon the dull fire. Thus he did not notice that an expression almost like a sneer drew up the loose flesh hanging upon her cheeks and gave a curious hardness to her eyes.

"Is there silver with you?" she asked.

Eoghan looked up surprised, and handed a shilling across to her.

"'Tis a brave thing to be with silver," she said sneeringly. "Though there's silver an odd while with me, and the folks that do be coming to frighten themselves in this house, and to be making game from old Sheila. Give me the hold of your hand!" she said suddenly.

He stretched his hand to her wonderingly.

She took hold of it and laid it out before her in her lap,

palm uppermost, looking downward on it and tracing out its lines slowly and elaborately. Then she drew the shilling across it so hard that he winced. He tried to pull his hand away from her, but she had fast hold of it.

“There’s a long line of life with you; but I doubt it’ll not lie easy and apt; I doubt it will not. There’s a line of fate lying agin it. It’s no gallous travel the one will be having with the other to be ever vexing it. Ah, look now, there’s the line of a woman that’s destroying the ways of it. That’s so now: it’s the line of a female woman. Look, look: it goes mixing with the line of fate: it’s not agreeing with the line of life, it’s not; there’s a disposition in the line o’ life that’s greatly strong—it’ll not easy be losing its hold—it’ll go traversing on, so it will—it’ll take its own way—see now where the line of fate does be destroying it, and it’s holding—it’s the woman; it’s the fate; it’s the life—oh, oh; see how it is!—will you see it? will you be seeing it?—it’s destroyed, see it! but it’s the disposition is in it—it’s the disposition the time you did be jumping in me, you hurtful creature—there it is!—you have it now, you have it—you’ll bide them all out, but you have it—it’s the bright ones do be drawing you on, the bright ones that I do ever be seeing, the bright ones that do at all times be lepping and rushing and crying to me shut-fast the way I am. See if it doesn’t be them! They’re mixing and twisting all over: mixing and twisting, and twisting and mixing, and lepping and rushing and running like the wind that does be roaring out. Bright ones, they are. Beautiful bright ones, white and tall and mighty-high. They’re beckoning. They’re round and about; look, they’re round and about, round and about, round and about all times. Ah, will you see them at rushing up and down in the great gallous pleasure making they have. It’s the line of a woman they are. In her two fine eyes and her great fine hair. Ah! Ah! Ah! it’s the line of life they are. Will you see them? Will you see them, you bloody fool! The life of life! The line of life! Rushing up and down, and lepping about, chasing and laughing and singing, with the whitey skin of them and the big terrible eyes of them, and the hair of them like the fire that does be streaming from the turf. It’s the line of life they do be on. It’s the line of fate they’re at rushing down like the big sparks from the sun. Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! it’s the woman; it’s the woman. Ha! Ha! Ha!”

Eoghan was sweating all over. An extraordinary terror held him. He wrenched his hand away from the woman.

“What’s amiss with you?” he said roughly, and glanced uneasily round about the room and at the door.

She laughed on and on, her great dark eyes mocking him, her black shawl fallen back upon her shoulders, until Eoghan, aroused to active hostility, checked her abruptly with a thrust against her shoulder.

“Let you stop now. What’s ailing with you? Will you have the whole place stirring?”

Her laughter sank low and became derisive, and her body began to rock to and fro timing with her low laughter like the swaying of a *caoining* woman. Derisive as it was, her laughter seemed to caress him mockingly, and Eoghan watched her with a strange apprehension gripping his mind. Then suddenly—quite abruptly and unexpectedly, like a cloud that may be swept away and dispersed—her laughter died away, and she leant forward and whispered to him.

“It wouldn’t be the hand,” she said.

Eoghan watched the extraordinary rapidity with which expression after expression chased one another across her heavy face. Their mobility was wonderful seeing the field they covered.

“It wouldn’t be the hand at all. Not the hand at all. That’s only the way of a foolish book a nurse did have in this house yesterday a hundred years ago, the time the bloody devils had me fast-shut. It’s the eyes. Esht, let me be telling you: it’s what does all times be looking out of the eyes. It’s what does be standing above the head and sitting on the shoulders. That’s so now, lad. It’s what does be coming into the mind the time a person would be looking. All the rest is words.”

“Is that so?” said Eoghan.

“That’s so now,” she said. “That’s just the way it is now. Would you be thinking me to be away in my wits, lad?”

Eoghan laughed a short, bitter laugh, and was silent a while before replying.

“If there’s some should be believed there’s many away in their wits that are buying cattle and setting spuds as good as the next. Maybe,” he added slowly, “them as is away do be only seeing the more and not the less at all. There’s never any saying.”

"Good lad; good lad," she said, and as she laughed her laughter was mellow and soft like the youth of a girl. "I did well to be feeding you, though there were some wanting you to be put to cow's milk you had that hardness of a bite with you, you little creature. I did well so." She leant forward and whispered fiercely into his face: "You'll be seeing, lad. You'll be seeing so you will; you'll be seeing yet. But you'll have the hard thing and the bitter thing in your mouth first. It'll not be coming on you any other way. I have that found out with thinking. I have that found out in the County Asylum, where the bloody devils have me shut-fast. Esht now!"

Eoghan edged away as she pressed forward toward him. He turned his head away from the fire burning dully in the eyes that were pushed but a few inches from his own. A revulsion stirred in him that he himself half felt to be based on an inevitable fascination. He was vaguely distressed at the turmoil of his mind, and he made an effort to recover his reserve and dignity.

"Let you be quiet now, with the strange talk you have, and your ways and all. Would you think was it for this I came seeking you out?"

He succeeded in checking her; and there was a lengthy silence between them. Then she started droning and complaining.

"And you who should be knowing a thing. You who should be knowing a thing. It's the young hasn't the sense. The bitter thing didn't go into the mouth of them that does be cleaning the sight of the eyes. It'll come to you yet, you little creature. It's the line of fate, and the line of life, and the line of a woman that the wee book was telling of. It was with the Master that way, and it'll be with yourself that way, and myself did be a hundred of years eating the bitter thing, with the great white ones calling to me and I shut-fast."

She began droning an old lullaby in Irish, rocking herself to and fro, and Eoghan had the uncanny thought that she was away back in her mind nursing himself in the years gone by, but nursing himself with all the bitter fruit of a lifetime's lonely thinking in her mouth. He tried, a little awkwardly, to comfort her, for indeed his emotion was deeply stirred.

"Let you be easy and quiet now. It's the queer talk

attached to you that troubled me. I wouldn't have you in any inconvenience, so I wouldn't."

She responded to every mood of his like a lake that changes colour with the drifting clouds above it. His gentler manner changed her so suddenly that it was as though her reaction to it was instinctive. She became shrewd and cunning.

"It'll be the cross roads," she said.

"What cross roads is that?" he asked, puzzled at her rapid changes.

"It's where the roads will be meeting," she said, "where the beautiful folk with the whitey skin do be lepping and rushing up and down them, the ones that the wee book did be talking of. It'll be the line of fate and the line of life and the line of a woman. Give me the hold of your hand," she said abruptly.

"I will not now," he said angrily.

She laughed mockingly at him.

"Good reason why you wouldn't. Good reason why you wouldn't, lad. There's not a person would be regarding the times to be coming on them when they do be having a kind of acquaintance in themselves that there's a dark thing waiting in the bend of the road itself. It's contradicting it a person would be for the comfort of his soul, and he sure and certain it's in the cast of his days to go meet it." She nodded her head at him, her whole body swaying in a gesture of derision that timed with the rhythms of her speech. Then she bent forward and scanned him. "Ah, hold your hand, lad. Do, lad. Hold it tight and hard, lad. But you'll not disguise them eyes of yours, and the thing that's designed in them for a person to be regarding. There's not a living soul can do that. It's not to be expected of them, it is not."

Eoghan flushed with the anger of a man into whose mind a sharp instrument had been fiercely inserted, wounding him ruthlessly and intentionally when he thought himself most secure.

"You'd a right to be quiet," he said, "there's that hurtful tongue with you. 'Tis little any person would be blamed bringing you to this sort of a house. It's a queer man itself would be living in the one house with you to bear with his life in the burnings of your tongue. Let you mind yourself now."

His sharp speech cut her. Slowly she seemed to wheel her whole being about to face the meaning of his words. There was something heavily tragic in her manner and in the anger that flamed in her face. Something rather terrible too, so wild was the light that burned up in her eyes.

"Would that be so now? Is it you should be putting that sort of a word across me? You, is it? You're the queer kind of a man any woman would be leaving a decent house to be marrying, if you can read in the books itself. A thingeen like you, is it? You that's the size of my thumb and a bit over, when I'm viewing the great white splendours of men that do be coursing over the hills! I'm heart-scalded with looking at you and thinking of the wonders of men that did be in the olden times by the books you have. Is it considering of them you are? Esht, man dear, it's the kind of a maneen you are that should be considering surely. It's a pity, Eoghan, you not to be like themselves, with a decent soft word with you."

"What's ailing you? If them's the sort of words you gave the Master, it's not himself now that's with you, God rest his soul!"

Instantly she sprang up and towered over him, a huge, ungainly figure, her face transformed by anger.

"Ach, will you be troubling me yet? Didn't I be destroyed at all times by the hurtful tongue that's with you. I've the right to be going on my own ways as well as yourself; I have now surely; and it'll not be yourself I'll have withering me any time I'm taking the heat of the fire. I'll not now. I'll not now. I'm too long scorched with the little spitting heat of the tongue with you, so I am." She stopped, looking downward upon Eoghan, and her eyes seemed to be narrowing to a sharper, more definite focus. It was curiously as if her vision was being cleared of clouds for her to take knowledge of the light of day. "Ah, is it yourself?" she continued, her voice wailing upward louder and louder. "Is it yourself that's walking the world with the old sound of his tongue on you? Mind me now, but there's a thing waiting for you at the bend of the road to clean that out from you. It will. It will. It will. I can see it waiting for you. You'll be mine altogether that time. I'll have my own I prayed for. I'll have my own I did be fighting for a hundred years shut-fast in the dark black house. I'll have my own I did be giving my milk to if you

had me hurted itself. I will; so I will. I'll bet him yet, the little *g'éar* tongue of a shrunkn thingeen uplifting his bits of books betwixt me and the heat of the fire, my curse to him, my dark black curse to him, the yellow fool's eyes of him, the wispy whiskers on him, voicing to me the way of a small hurted mouseen over the ruin of a big book, or the bark of a fox in the night, the little slender *traithnin* with the brag of a man himself that wouldn't be the thumb of any one of my white comrades that do be coursing the hills, that he may be scalded!"

Eoghan sprang to his feet.

"Let you keep your tongue from the Master!" he called.

"Put you down a roaring bright fire," says he. "I will now," says I, "and may you burn out of it, and burn forever," says I. And then he went out with the child into the middle of the twinkling stars. And that was the end. All the rest is words. But I'll be burning you clean, I will. There's great power in wanting a thing. Give me the hold of your hand now!"

"I will not," said Eoghan, drawing away from her.

She laughed loudly at him, a whirling anger mixing with the sharp scorn of her voice, her words scarce distinguishable, interspersed as they were through the wild laughter.

"The line of life, and the line of fate, and the line of a woman. I'll burn you clean yet. Put you down a roaring bright fire, is it? But I'll burn you clean at the cross roads you little hurtful creature. You'll be all for the shining bright ones yet, them that's as high as two men and them that's as high as five. Ha! Ha! It's the cross roads, lad. It's not you is the bloody little thingeen."

"What's ailing you? Sit easy!" Eoghan said, his emotions in a tumult.

He shouted at her, seeking to arrest the whirling tumult she made, and augmented it the more. In the middle of the uproar a nurse came running in.

"Stop now, Sheila, and be quiet at once," she said, taking hold of Sheila's wrist and forcing her backward upon her stool.

She spoke in sharp, commanding tones, and it shocked Eoghan to see the effect on his mother and the ascendancy implied. Sheila's laughter trailed off into wailing tears, and as she was sat upon her stool again, concluded in a sobbing *caoine*, the whole figure of the woman swaying to and fro

with the head buried in the hands and the fingers clutching the hair. The sight of her before had been terrible. The sight was now pitiful beyond words.

"You must come out now," the nurse said to him. "You have her upset. She'll need to be alone."

Eoghan followed her out of the room dazedly, and heard with a shudder the grate of the key in the lock.

"She's not often bad. She's not bad at all really most times. And sometimes she's quite quiet and decent. She's very observant and canny, do you know. She'd startle a person not used to her with her knowledge of what you'd be thinking. It's when she begins fortune-telling that her madness comes out. She's very bad then. I think she had some trouble, the poor thing. Was she wanting to tell you your fortune?"

Eoghan had gone with the nurse down the corridors listening to her talk, and they had reached the hall when his question was put to him.

"It's a wonder any person not to be mad shut in that place and any jackeen's orders to be put upon them the way she is now, ma'am," he said. "Did you but let her loose she'd be breathing herself healthful again, and none to be gainsaying her. That's what I'm thinking now, ma'am. Good-day to you, ma'am!"

And he strode across the hall, and before the porter could shuffle to the door he had swung it open and gone out into the day, leaving the door gaping behind him.

CHAPTER VIII.

HE stepped out under the glaring noon of a hot summer's day. For a few minutes the light dazzled him, and he put up his hand to shroud his eyes. He did not stop, however, but walked fiercely on through the streets as though borne onward by something outside himself.

There were a good many astir in the streets, and wherever Eoghan went the people turned round to see this tall figure, with the wide-brimmed, soft black hat thrust well down on the head, and a none too kempt red beard, stride rapidly forward muttering to himself. But he had knowledge of none. The world through which he went was far

removed from them, though they jostled him in the street. To them his behaviour was so altogether strange as to be unaccountable: they doubted his reason; and when he passed the barracks some of the idle constabulary slouching about the door wandered down the street after him in the expectation of some work to be found.

However, he saw none. He avoided the people in his path as he might have avoided trees. He was a compact, complete emotion. His being had been burned to one entity by his emotion; sufficient to itself; by reflex obeying its own laws; lifted above the disintegration of thought; and he went onward, led by the impulse that ruled him without knowing what it was or whither it took him.

So he went automatically at night to the westward of a stone mearing without knowing that the slight wind ruling sat in the east; and he slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

So it was the following day and all the sunlit days that succeeded. He found his meals where he could, and fulfilled all the outward ritual of living orderly enough, but without any knowledge of what he did, and without any conscious memory of what he had done. He always slept beneath the stars. That was never any considerable hardship to him; in the weather that prevailed the greater hardship would have been to be enclosed within walls. Yet it was no such choice that urged him. It was impossible for him to do otherwise. His emotion repelled him from the nearness of his fellows for the unconscious hours of sleep, and drew him to the naked friendship of earth and sky.

So he walked on and on through the days. He kept by mountain or hill where he could; and when his onward course took him away from these he went on restlessly until he came upon others.

Then the country became sterner. The hills were no longer green-clad, but dark and ominous under the moon. Field and bog changed to dark heath covered now with heather-bloom. Cultivation lay behind him, and he went onward between bare, severe mountains, through dark deserted valleys that seemed even to repel the light of the sun. The cottages did not lie above green fields, but stabbed the heath with sudden points of whiteness at the bottom of yawning valleys. When he left the road to go upon the hills he had to go leaping upon hummocks, or up dry brooks of black earth.

Thus one day he climbed round the shoulder of a mountain, and his eyes looked round expectantly till they rested on an island that shone away in the distance, sunlit under a blue sky in a calm, lazy, blue sea. The restless movement onward seemed for a moment to be quietened in him, and he stood long like a statue gazing seaward, unconscious of everything but the island that lay out towards the horizon.

A faint evening mist was beginning to creep over the water and to throw a soft veil about the hills, and it gave an uncertainty to the knotted mass of mountain and cliff rising sheer from the ocean that the island seemed to be from where he stood. In shape and colour it looked extraordinarily beautiful as the sun shone on it from behind; yet remote and strange and stern. His eye sought out peak after peak of its hills outlined as they soon were against the sunset. The water shone opalescent with a gleaming golden path that burned toward the sun where it sank in a blaze of clear colours. And as the sun's rays glanced across the island its hills shone like a great purple and crimson jewel burning dully in the calm and gleaming water.

As he stood there gazing upon it he became part of the scene and the scene became part of him. And when the light of day faded, by imperceptible gradations of beauty, into the white light of the moon, under which the hills stood up like spirits about him, he still stood there living in and with the scene: and finally sank down calmly and slept on the heather as though falling back into that from which he had emerged.

The following morning he was astir early, striding rapidly round the hills towards the town he could see lying at the base of the bay. It was nearly noon before he reached it. Going down toward the quay he met a man coming up on horseback with a woman behind him. They were the only people in the street.

"Did a hooker to Maolan go yet this day?" he asked.

"Well, it did not now," the man replied. "But there's one on the hap of going, on my soul."

He hurried down the hill. As he rounded the corner he saw that the hooker was already beginning to cast loose from the quay. Instantly he ran down the quay at full speed.

Those who were about the quay casting off the ropes suddenly felt somebody bursting through them, jolting one

of the number over, and saw a tall man in wide-a-wake hat leap for the hooker that was already a little distance from the quay. They saw him alight on the deck, slip backward and fall against the gunnel. They saw him pick himself up, proceed unperturbedly to the bow of the vessel, and stand there gazing seaward as though such embarkations were his habit.

They saw, too, that the captain—whose strange shouting while they had been casting the ropes loose they now understood—strode up to the newcomer. His dark beard and swarthy complexion proclaimed him as from the mountains to southward of the bay, and matched strangely with the newcomer's red beard as blue eye looked into blue eye. The captain's language soon passed into Irish, for a rhythm and selection of speech more apt for his need. But the newcomer scarcely seemed to notice him. He drew out his purse, counted out the due fare, and returned with pre-occupied dignity to his vision over the sea.

CHAPTER IX.

EOGHAN'S preoccupation changed its content, but it did not pass from him when, with a dignified demeanour covering a joy that cried out in him like the laugh of a child, he trod the land of Maolan. He was still a complete, an unbroken, emotion, drawing on its own impulse and independent of the outer world, though the intentness of his journey was changed into the utter joy of the end that had been gained.

Those who met him, passed him greetings or gave him a welcome, were to him like the sudden songs of yellow-hammers on the whins or the cattle that stood on the heath. Earth stood before him as he had grown to know her, in one of her beautiful moods though tired a little with the heat of the sun, and he looked in her face without thinking of any particular feature of that which gave him ease. He was greatly contented; and he went over the hills slowly like one who had no wish to hasten through the places of his ease.

It was not until he had passed beyond Coisabhaun and was making his way beside the lake toward the heaths above

Islean that he felt the impact of the outer world. The violent reaction his mind had taken from the horror of his meeting with his mother came to a term as by a sudden blow that shatters a mirror. He stopped, pitifully seeking to discover what it was that had thrown him from the heights. Slowly and painfully the knowledge came to him that, whether he went by the road or went by the heath, he would have to pass Nancy before he could get to his own place. And a fateful sense stirred in him that he was about to meet her. It was like a premonition of that destiny, the deed forestalling itself in his apprehension.

Heavily he went across the heath by a line that would take him just above her cottage, where, if she were anywhere handy, she could not have failed to see him. And as he came nearer a mad excitement arose in his blood.

She was stacking turf, when she became aware of someone passing along the heath above. She felt that he stopped, and as the pressure of his interest in her weighed upon her she looked up to see who it was. Her hands were full of sods of turf ready to stack into the *glaim*, and as she looked up these fell out and her arms fell limply beside her.

It was only for a moment, however. She was soon alert. She glanced hurriedly around to see if she was observed; and then, softly and carelessly droning a song to herself, she jumped up on the bank and made her way up the heath towards Eoghan. She did not look at him. Her attention was rather behind and about her as though she feared observation. Nor did she stop when she reached Eoghan; but as she passed him she said to him, still without looking at him:

“Let you come over the rim of the bray beyond.”

Eoghan turned and went after her.

“You’re welcome, Eoghan,” she said, turning to face him, and extending him her hand.

He shook the hand she gave him, seemed for a moment as though he were about to retain it, and then abruptly let it fall. It fell heavily against her side as though she had not expected it to be loosed so soon. She was smiling at him, but there was no smile on the set, drawn face that looked into hers.

“Are you just after coming?” she asked.

“I am just after coming,” he said.

“You were long away, Eoghan,” she said.

"I was long away," he replied.

"Well, it's '*se do bheatha a' bhaile*,'" she said. "There's many will be glad to welcome you, I'm sure. Will you be long resting?"

"There's never any saying."

"You'll likely not stir till after the Christmas now," she continued, struggling against his brevity of reply.

"I mightn't now," he said after a pause, as though reluctant to take up his reply.

It was as if he felt that their conversation was cutting no edge, and she began to be resentful of the tense silence that followed before he spoke.

"How's yourself now?" he asked.

"Ah, I'm middling, so I am," she answered lightly, ignoring the significance with which his words were laden. "It's a queer way any person would be, well or ill itself, always sitting in the one place."

"Is that so?" he said.

Again she ignored the astringency that gave his words their sense of a meaning beyond a meaning.

"It's well to be yourself, travelling the big world with going from one place to another place. It's not many have all that lucky chance. They're after drawing the turf now. They'll be digging the taties next. Then there'll be storms in it till a person would be frightened of the house and every kind of a thing. It'll be the Christmas then; and marrying after. It's equal if a person does be well itself, or badly maybe. The ways of the place'll not be changing either time. There's always the sea roaring out, and there's always the same kind of talk for every turn of the day and the year."

He was checked by the strain of bitterness and discontent that she was too careless to attempt to disguise.

Her words, recounting the round of the year's service, awoke a certain hunger in him, and he looked away up the heath where *Scráig Mór* looked over the ridge of the further bray. A purple glow shone dully over it in the fall of the day, and it had an unaccustomed nearness peering, as it seemed to do, over the heath upon him. A soft smile came into his glance, and he was not aware that Nancy was closely regarding his averted face.

"Was it yourself dancing that night, Eoghan?" she asked.

“What’s that?” he said, without turning his head, and speaking absentmindedly.

“Was it yourself with the *cleamaraigh*?” she asked again, somewhat obviously avoiding the mention of the night.

“It was then,” he said, looking keenly at her.

It was now her turn to look away, and she did so awkwardly with a curious toss of defiance.

“I did always be wondering was it. I was thinking surely it was—a girl can always be telling who it would be is touching her—but what it was brought you to that company, I couldn’t tell that.” She waited awkwardly, and then tossed with defiance again before she continued. “I wouldn’t have him next me for a week and more after that, I was all that troubled. It was Father Hennessey had us reconciled.”

There was more in the way she spoke than of something past and gone. It was rather as if she had been waiting to tell Eoghan this, and as though it now hung awkwardly on her lips because long determination had broken the clean force of the first resolution.

Some time elapsed before he spoke. She did not dare to look round at him, for she knew that his eyes were fixed on her as though to pluck out from her the meaning of what she had said. Then she heard his voice speaking to her in a strained, hard way.

“You’d a right to be setting your mind in your own house. It’s the way it is now, I wouldn’t be destroyed and flattered with you anyways, not reckoning you to be married and all the way you are, with the Master from beyond having a right to you, and the words put on you that are making you a different sort of a woman every night of the year. There’ll be no hurted curlews calling from this out. Let you heed that now. And let you not draw my mind to things I’ve not a mind to be remarking. I’ll heed the path I’m going, whatever it be itself, and I’ll not be turning to the right or to the left. That’s the way it is now. It’s no other way with me at all. I’ll be wary now. I won’t come next your flaming cheeks and the heat of the old burning living yet through my body.”

His mind had slipped to the phrase he spoke because she had flushed hot at his words. Her cheeks were flaming red, and her eyes almost glittered with anger.

“Who’s attracting you?” she stammered. “Who’s

putting you by your dirty road? Wasn't my heart set easy in my house a week gone by, till you came lepping the heath? Would you have it I was regarding the road and watching for the look of your face passing in the daytime? Well, I wasn't now, and let you not be putting that thing on me. Have shame to yourself, and leave me peaceful."

"I'm not putting the word on you," Eoghan said, still speaking in a strained voice, "though 'tis likely itself, I'm thinking now, or them words wouldn't come drifting from your mouth. Isn't it what the heart would be wishful for the mouth would be letting drop a hint of and a person angry the way you are now?"

"Who is it angry? Myself, is it? I'm angry at you to be coming straying about this place"—she struggled for words—"and I a married woman that's quit with romancing and pleasure."

He stiffened and looked sharply at her, for her manner made it plain that she intended to sting him with the taunt of tempting her, though she hesitated at that subject.

"Married you are," said he bitterly, a quick flame mounting in his mind, "and set easy and comfortable you are in that blessed state it is plain for a person to be seeing and he not needing to find the shape of a canoe in the middle dark of the night."

He turned to go, and instantly seemed as though he could not tear himself from her. She was a fuller woman than when he had seen her last, and in her flushed anger she looked beautiful now in her crimson bodice and blue skirt in the warm fall of the evening—more matured and dignified, yet not less supple of figure than before. He seemed, with his determination to leave her, to become aware of her in an entirely different sense, and he glanced alternately at her and up the heath as though wrestling with himself to be gone. He became strangely aware, moreover, of a powerful interplay of passion between the two of them, in the restless silence, like the waters of the old river, long pent back, surging between them again and lifting each of them off the knowledgable sane earth.

It was clear that she also felt this; though in the bitterness of having exposed herself and having been plainly read by him she was less influenced by it. She half expected him to come fiercely up to her, seize her and embrace her, for he was breathing hotly and excitedly opposite her; and the re-

action to her expectancy made her ready to strike him when he did so, in revenge for that exposure. Instead of that she suddenly heard him say :

“ ’Tis you are the sort that does be putting black sin through the big world. Hadn’t you a right to be keeping the house? ”

“ Is it me? What brought you back to this place if it wasn’t to be putting your two eyes on myself? ”

“ And wasn’t it you that was waiting on me, and watching the road for the sight of my face? ”

“ If it was itself, it was only funning, and the way any person would be tired with the one thing always to be doing, and a man with the weight of porter always on him. ”

“ ’Tis always that way with you, but there’s the scorch of heat on you now that myself did know. ”

“ Likely it’s your dark cursing, for the thing you’re set on you’ll never be quitting. ”

The responses were quick, low and passionate. After their first blind gropings with each other they seemed to have come suddenly into an astonishing clearness of light; and in that white light they spoke as though they vehemently hated each other for the disturbance of their peace. In their frames each felt the other like a fever; alternately and violently attracting and repelling the other like two whirling bodies in space.

Then he turned and strode away up the heath as though he had been expelled from her presence. She hardly knew he had gone; and did not see him stop near the height of the bray and turn and look back at her, struggling with himself, and then go rapidly on his way again.

CHAPTER X.

SHE went slowly down the heath homeward. She had often imagined herself meeting Eoghan again, and had conjured many pictures of how this meeting would take place. It had been her secret pleasure to herself; her island to which she could withdraw herself when galled by the surging will of others; her privacy where she had shut herself against her outward life; her world where things fell out as she would

have them to be while the contrary world continued without; her romance against the continuity and monotony that irked her. And she had, without obviously willing to do so, tried to guide the actual meeting into the imagined scene; when the violence of reality revised her picture and left her angry and sore. Yet she was not only angry and sore; she was bewildered and afraid.

In that mood she went down the heath, trying in a kind of blind way to adjust herself to the new situation. At the house she stumbled over the sods of turf that had fallen from her apron when she had first seen Eoghan; and she kicked them petulantly and irritably out of her way, and went on into the house.

"There's no saying where the cattle are strayed," she said defensively as she entered; and then ceased abruptly when she saw that James had returned and was sitting in the house.

He sat on the bench by the bedside, leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped before him; and he did not look up when Nancy entered. Maurya was seated on her usual stool opposite him, but behind her now, in the gable-end of the house, a door had been cut to a new bedroom. Her hair was now very grey, and her cheeks had become rounded, detracting from her dignity and robbing her of her old aspect of fearless strength. Her very pose as she sat on her stool seemed changed; but this was rather due to the indefinable change that had come over her. Her watchfulness was apprehensive rather than challenging. Her reserve of manner seemed based now as much on caution as on a careless perceiving strength.

There had been a kind of sullen silence in the cottage before Nancy entered, and now, as she set about one or two tasks about the place, this was added to by her presence. Her look of surprise on seeing James had changed to a look hard to define, and best described as a watchfulness that was ready not to let the offensive pass from her in any dispute that might happen to arise.

The dissatisfaction she had felt coming down the heath was now an active resentment. When she went into the further room she pushed past her mother roughly; and it was a strange sight to see Maurya move her stool nearer towards the fire in response to that signal that she was in the way.

Later on, when she came out of the room, she went to

build the fire anew and set a kettle upon it, and, finding James in the way, she jerked his knee aside with a motion of her own, roughly, and without a word.

He looked up at her, his eyes big and round in questioning protest; and the change to be seen in his face was as subtly marked as in Maurya Flaherty's opposite him. His expression was heavy and cantankerous, with a sodden cynicism like a cloud upon it. The old ingenuousness was changed to an aspect of continual protest; the volatility to a sullen quarrelsomeness; the old flash of his eye was now a roving restlessness and apprehension. His twisted moustache had porter yet dripping from it, showing whence he sought comfort and courage. And now, as his eyes opened in round, amazed protest, he had the look of a man who was willing to be made angry easily as he had need of anger in order to express himself.

Indeed, in these three in that cottage could be read quite clearly the past years' history that the walls could have told: of action and reaction of souls and conditions of souls, of psychological tension and interplay, of conflict of wills and intentions, of emotions and desires, fates and characters and determinations that met and contended ceaselessly, weaving a criss-cross pattern of life—unseen tides all of them, only to be discovered, yet to the attentive eye very clearly to be discovered, in the bodily erosions that they caused.

The tides came to the surface, however, with her vicious, contemptuous thrust of him. They came to the surface, moreover, in his angry reply; and the more especially as the anger seemed summoned to the need of the reply.

"You'd a right," said he, "not to be striking me."

She was kneeling before him as he spoke, drawing the hot sods in a mound in the centre of the hearth and stacking fresh sods round them; and she half-turned toward him, without looking at him, in order to bring the direction of her reply upon him.

"You'd a right not to be stretching in the way."

He blinked at her; and scowled. The pout of his lips had still the old child-like suggestion.

"I was not stretching: I wasn't," he said, leading for a contention. But she gave no heed to him, and contemptuously continued her task. So he leaned out and gave her a thrust on the shoulder. "I was not stretching," he said, and thrust her again. His action was as if he valued the

opportunity of putting his hand upon her, for his thrust was gentle enough, almost feeble indeed.

"Let you keep your hand from me," she said, warningly, looking round at the shoulder he had struck.

"Then let you not be saying I was stretching," he said peevishly, with a pitiful sound of hopelessness in his voice.

She took no notice of him. His manner in the house was openly contemptuous. It was easy to see that the one who had lost all had thereby come to gain all. She made no disguise of the mastery she had won from her despair: she even made a provocation of it as though she knew that Maurya was watching her closely from the other side. Indeed, the fact that Maurya was at that moment mending James Burke's clothes was its own incidental exposition of the situation that prevailed.

"A person would be needing to put his hand across you, so he would," said Maurya sharply. "There's no other sort would right and ready you to the decent pattern of a married woman, though them that do it are the worse in themselves. The stretch of a weighty hand to you would be apt to teach you manners, and you're the middling bad sort of a woman that's demanding the like of that doctoring—a hard, proud woman with no shame attached to you."

As Maurya spoke, Nancy rose up and went to the door to look out at the warm summer's night. Now she spoke from there.

"It should be a lusty fellow, I've a notion, trying those tricks with me; and not that one sitting there with the porter dripping from him in the great fear of losing the school," she said.

"I'll be putting my hand to you yet, Nancy," he said, and though he spoke in bravado, and with the uncertainty of bravado, there was something in his voice that spoke of a deeper resolve towards which he was approaching. "Let you wait yet."

"Ah, it's not hard telling for what you'll be shifting all them buckets of porter. But it'll take a great weight to be bringing you that far."

"Will you have shame, and cease the bitter tongue," Maurya said. "It's a true word surely that a bad woman's a curse from Almighty God the same as a decent woman's a light travelling through the ways of the world."

"You'd a right to be leaving the Almighty God from it," said Nancy, turning from the door, and walking about the end of the house. "It was yourselves set me walking this road, and in soul you'll follow after. If you're misliking it now you'd a right to be heeding it sooner." A stranger could have heard a settled bitterness in her voice, and have given her the pity she seemed so little to demand, and which she would probably have scorned.

If it was her wish to strike them to their uneasy silence she succeeded. And she herself walked restlessly about the end of the house in a suppressed excitement quite different from the decision her words professed. Every time she reached the door she looked out into the moonlit night as though there were a presence abroad that she expected any moment to invade the house. The moonlight lay white on the heath and fields. The sea was like silver between the shore and the cliffs that stood up mysteriously like gods on the further side of the bay, fading into a vague grey that stretched outward until the beautiful shape of Oileanliath was dimly outlined against the further distance. It was a scene from which anything godlike and beautiful, full of terror by reason of exceeding beauty, might have emerged and come naturally within the house; but such an expectation would have smitten to a rapt breathless stillness and not to the restless apprehension that Nancy displayed.

"What brought you back all that early?" she said, stopping in her pacing to and fro, in open resentment of James' presence in the house.

James looked puzzledly about the house trying to recall the memory of something that evaded him. Then his face cleared. Indeed, it took an expression of decision that it had lacked all the evening.

"I'm after hearing some news," he said.

"It would be needing some news surely to bring you from that place," she said caustically. "What news was that now?"

"Ah, well, it was some news," he said. "It was some tidings. It was an information I had."

There was just the tremor of fear in her as she heard his words, into which he endeavoured somewhat confusedly to put the ring of menace; but she checked it immediately with the practice of one who did not intend to let the mastery pass from her. She walked up and down the end of the

house for some time with a curious supple swing of her body before she spoke again. But she did not look out of the door. Her attention was within the house.

"Tidings, was it?" She spoke softly, as though to herself, in a kind of gentle derision. "Information now! So it would be, troth. Why wouldn't it be?" But as this did not draw him, she turned and challenged him with a quick fierceness.

"What was it you are after hearing?"

He became wary. A sly expression came into his face. The menace faded, and he became almost childlike in his obvious desire not to let his grip slip on the advantage that had come into his hand. All the other thoughts in his mind faded before that immediate advantage.

"Well now," he said, "it was just some news. It's just some news that's presently with me. Maybe I'll never be telling you."

She was standing now looking out through the door, as though she saw something out there in the moonlit beauty of the earth; and it was from there she spoke, without turning into the house.

"Likely I'm knowing already," she said; and directly she had said so something from within the house assailed her and she regretted the words.

James Burke sat straight on the bench staring at her in the doorway, and in his rounded eyes anger came surging on the heels of his first amazement. There was a kind of despair there too; something that called for pity and protection; there was amazement and bewilderment; but it was in the rush of anger that succeeded that he took an ascendancy he had not had at any moment hitherto in his relations with the woman who turned to face him. He sprang at her as she turned.

"What's that you're saying?" he cried out, his words coming toward her like a battering storm. "You knowing that never stirred from the house or from the fields! Then you're the bad, wicked woman so, so you are! Bad, bad, you are, that no decent person would be heeding. You're a dirty bad woman that the gentle and the simple would be putting a curse to in the backward places of the towns. That's what you are now, and no other. There was never the kindness attached to you, but who was to say you were heedless and wicked the same as a person would be putting

any neglected use? Who was to say that? Who would be saying all that load of a bad thing?"

His words rushed from him stammering on their way in a strange mixture of magnificence and incoherence. He shook with passion opposite her. He moved his arms up and down all the time, with his fists clenched as though he longed to strike her, always as if upon the point of doing so, yet never succeeding.

It was her calm demeanour that stayed him. She stood looking at him, with a faint sneer on her lips, and with a curious old rigid dignity such as one would rather have expected Maurya to have displayed. It stayed him; finally it silenced him as he looked into her face; yet it was the rigidity of weakness. She had, as she had turned to face him, tried to summon her ascendancy; but it had failed her. Her mind was eloquent with the desires, perhaps the purposes, she would not have admitted to herself. For the first time the sense of being wronged, that had given her power and curtness through all the days, failed her. She felt strangely convicted; and so she stiffened hardly before him, in a silence where all words failed her.

He was chilled and helpless before her impassive manner, clothed only in the rags of his rage.

"How would you be knowing he was come back wasn't it in some bad way? Tell me that now!" he asked. "Will you tell me?" he shouted at her. "Tell me! Tell me!" he shouted in a breakdown of helplessness as she still remained silent.

"Oh, I'm cursed with you, God help me. I'm ruined altogether in my ways. Why did I ever see you? Why ever now did the Goodness put you before my ways, and I so peaceful and all?" He took hold of her and flung her aside and ran out of the house, plunging and stumbling down the *boithirin*.

If she had felt convicted before, she felt doubly so now. Curious depths stirred in her. If he had buried himself in porter hitherto that had been his own concern, for he had elected the state at which she had maintained but a protest; but now as he went (and she knew well where he went) he was driven by something that she introduced. That fact found a peculiar echo in her as she walked, with a certain stiffness in her mind, and in her bodily carriage also, toward the bench he had vacated. There was a feeling of

guilt in her; and it was intensified by the deliberate way in which she steeled herself against it.

"Is it that fellow that's back now?" she heard Maury ask her, with challenge and warning in her voice.

"Ah, don't be troubling me!" she said.

She felt that her cold mastery had diminished in the general weakness of her present state of mind, but toward her mother it was not hampered by the same sense of guilt and responsibility. She sat and watched the boiling kettle without any attempt to remove it.

"You'd a right to be heeding yourself, Nancy, or there's surely be wonderful trouble coming to this house in the end of all," Maurya said again.

Nancy sat, bent forward, looking over the fire.

"Will you not be troubling me," she said irritably, with a break in her voice. Then after a time she added angrily "Men do be a great hurt, standing before our ways and putting us out of the road. It's a queer thing they to be in it all."

CHAPTER XI.

VERY like a wave that sways along the waters of a still lake hard to tell whence it comes or how it goes, and not to be perceived save in the wash beside the shore, the news surged through the village that Eoghan O'Clery had returned; and after it there came the following information, that went more gently and spread less far, that Master Burke was in a Antony Clancy's destroyed in his mind, and very wild; and that Antony, the decent man, in pity for him, had refused to serve him any more porter, and had bidden him go home and sleep. It was hard to tell how the news travelled; but it was taken with calm dignity, discussed lightly, and construed with the deepest significance.

Among the others it reached Seumas the smith. It was only the earlier wave that touched him. He was standing at the gable-end of his house with some others, and received it as though it were a familiar and age-old tidings. It came to him so; and he received it so; and it passed on its way with the broken scraps of conversation; but, in spite of the dignified and leisured receipt, which was perhaps ever

ore emphatic in him than in the others, it wrought him to great state of excitement. He was hard-set to contain his excitement; and thus became taciturn, cold and off-hand. He hardly heard the further talk of the men, so vividly did the news he had heard stand out before his mind.

His immediate thought was to go at once and seek out Eoghan; but that was an impossible thing; it was an outrage to the accepted dignities he had breathed all his life to rely upon a man or to make any acknowledgment in outward demeanour that the succession of things was otherwise than had always been. The two things battled in him. Then he stopped on a thought.

"What's the case with myself now?" he muttered in his argument with himself. "All this hell of a stir, and I that ever knew the fellow rightly!"

"What's that now?" asked the man beside him, turning to him.

"There was never anyone knew the fellow rightly."

"Eoghan O'Clery, is it?"

"Ah!"

"Well, there wasn't now. He was the quiet sort of a man. He was just the sort of a man that went his own ways, and I'm after saying now there was never any hurt attached to him. There wasn't, in soul. A person couldn't be helping the misfortunes that come to him, and haven't we all to be coming back to this place one time or another, there's that kind of an attraction in it?"

Seumas let the conversation fall at that, and moved away from the house. He drifted down the hill.

He felt somewhere in his mind that he had something to communicate to Eoghan, something that it was very necessary that Eoghan should know, and he was bewildered. He drifted along the road, like a boat that might be washed a tide.

When he reached the river beside which he would need to turn up to reach Eoghan's cabin he stopped, cursed himself, and turned back abruptly to get a drink. At the door he stopped again, and, seeing no one about to notice his indecision, turned back again. He entered Tomas McLir's cottage. There he learnt that Tomas was abroad: likely he went back to take a suppeen; and so he went the same way himself, his mind thoroughly emptied of all his desires to seek out Eoghan O'Clery. His indecisions disgusted him,

and he took his sharp resolve to take his sup himself and let the night rest at that.

There were a great many there, and at the other side of the long, low house he saw Tomas McLir sitting on a porte barrel. There was never more than the one lamp at Sean McLir's, and the stained walls and earthen floor assisted in its marked inclination to keep its light to itself; and therefore Seumas did not see Tomas very clearly. Yet he thought he saw Tomas bend forward suddenly, and a satirical expression come quickly into his face as he entered; and he judged that his mission was guessed there, if indeed it had not been expected. Lucky he had dismissed all notion of that visit to Eoghan, for now he felt armed against Tomas. He took his pint, and stood at the bar talking to Sean, hardly heeding the low conversation that came from the house.

As he had nearly finished his measure he heard someone coming up from the other end of the house, and Seumas Clancy stood beside him.

"Is it yourself?" said Seumas. "You'll take another with me now. Two pints, Sean."

"Ah, I won't. I amn't using much."

"Do now!"

"I will not. I'm contented so."

"You will. We weren't speaking this long time now—not since we had words in the spring gone by. Come on now. Let you be friendly. Two pints, Sean."

"Well, I don't mind. *Slainte!*"

"*Slainte 'gus saoghal!*"

The smith stood there in a protective silence, and Seumas seemed wrapt in reflection; so that while they set their measures on their way, neither gave much heed to the other. The silence was meditative and unconstrained. Then Seumas took the conversation gently on the road.

"These are grand days," he said.

"They are now. Good enough presently."

"Well they are. They are good days."

Thereupon the silence controlled them again, until Seumas set forth once more.

"I doubt it won't hold for the harvest," he said.

"I am doubting will it."

"Ah, it won't. 'Tis never long fine together. 'Tis the most place for changes when the sea is round and about it. 'Tis always on the hap of a change."

"That is so now."

"Is it rightly Eoghan's back in it?"

The smith waited a moment cautiously before replying. Seumas had not spoken naturally. It is no news to be telling him of the vagaries of Maolan weather. That was talk for a stranger. That was merely talking. So he became quietly watchful, his mind full of suspicion.

"What's that now?" he asked.

"They're saying Eoghan O'Clery's back to this place now."

"I'm not acquainted with that," Seumas said.

"You didn't see him so?" Seumas asked.

Seumas took a drink of his porter, and as he did so he looked quickly at Seumas. He thought he saw an unaccustomed absent-mindedness on that heavy face, a kind of sly vagueness that disguised a prank afoot. He set his glass down, and as he did so he turned his body about. He noticed that the barrel beside Tomas McLir was empty, and that Tomas was leaning forward listening.

"I did not," he said, looking straight at Seumas, and speaking loudly enough for Tomas to hear if it interested him.

A smile flickered over Seumas' face that the smith did not fail to notice. Nor did he fail to notice the way in which Seumas looked away from him. He felt hot and angry; but he held himself strongly in restraint. To be made game of (especially on this subject, with the implication of an attack on Eoghan) made him feel as if he wanted to smash things. But he held hold of himself, for that was the mood they wanted to awaken in him.

He heard Tomas' voice across the house.

"Ach!"

That was all: but scepticism, mockery, derision and goading were in it. It cut across the room with a puzzling directness, so that it could not be mistaken at whom it was directed. And both Seumas and the smith turned to face Tomas in one movement that directed the attention of the whole house to the theme, and broke every other conversation short.

Tomas' fine old face was a picture of mockery. His whole body, indeed, was eloquent of mockery. He was like a gesture of mockery cut in statuary, such was his pose in every limb. But it trembled with life. Sitting there in

the half-darkness on his porter barrel, he was like a derisive finger pointed at the smith across the room.

Tomas said no more, and the smith tried to ignore him. But it was impossible to ignore the directness and vitality of that assault, to say nothing of the fact that the whole company had turned to him.

"What's that now, Tomas McLir?" he asked.

"You're not knowing the lad beyond was in it?" Tomas asked derisively, without the slightest relaxation of the one complete gesture into which his body seemed as though it were cast.

"I'm not believing it, neither nor," said the smith stiffly.

"It's right now, by crimes," a lad broke in upon them. He had just entered, and was standing beside Seumas. He was excited, with an excitement quite recently begotten, and which he was helping with another pint. "The Master's abroad at Islean now in the way of a great madness all about it. Isn't he saying his missis and the fellow that's back have their heads together? He's mad now. There'll be murder in it, wait yet. There's the hell of divilment in it by all that's telling, and the Master's putting the dirty words at his missis and the dripping weight of accusation on the place. He'll not go back to it, says he. He'll strip her, says he; and then it's drowning himself the next time. He's roaring with the ailments and the porter. Didn't Antony bid him quit the place decent and easy, and wouldn't given him divil the drop more?" And he buried his mouth in the porter, drinking it in great gulps.

"You'd a right to be quitting that, lad, and bringing yourself to bed," said Seumas quietly.

But Sean McLir took up the theme where the lad had left it.

"Troth and it's shameful such things to be so. There never were such things in this place before. That Nancy beyond had a right to be having some shame, so she had in troth. Aren't our women decent and forthstepping and rightly bedizened in their minds, the same as she's a scandal to them, a very streeling woman in soul? It's the way it is, I never met anything amiss with Eoghan O'Clery myself. I'm sort of protecting him, I am. Didn't he quit the place so as to be escaping the reach and acquaintance of her eyes? It's public knowledge he did that, as any person knows."

"He did; well, he did now," someone agreed in the name of the company.

"Didn't he come back, moreover?" the lad challenged, he who had spoken before, lurching across the counter.

"Troth, he did now," said Sean, putting the glasses out of the lad's way and harm. "Would you have himself forbid to this place because herself's ia it? A very strange notion that would be, in troth. Doesn't every person be coming back to this place the way they'd a right to?"

"Ah now, but the Master was saying they'd the heads put together. That's what he was saying. Their heads is put together, says he, and I'll murder and skelp and bury them deep, the two of them, says he, and drown myself after with the loss of the most beautiful woman in the big world gone out of my two hands that was never my own for my joy and happiness. That's what he said then."

"A drunken man would be saying any living thing!" said Sean calmly. "And yourself'd best be striking the road, and knocking sounds out of it. Bring yourself to your bed."

"Give me another pint," demanded the lad.

"Troth, and I will not," said Sean. "This is no house for drunken streelers, but a decent place for talking company and a bit of fun an odd time. Bring yourself away now."

The lad went his way grumbling and cursing; and in the silence that succeeded the smith made his way to be gone.

"You didn't see him yet so?" Tomas McLir called to him, loth to let him out of his grasp.

The smith turned at the door, and looked across the house. There was serious business in his mind now, and that gave it resiliency.

"I did, of course," he said. "Wasn't it myself that went to the four quarters of the big world, to Chiny and Japan, to bring him out of it distributed in every place, and amn't I after coming with him to this place on the wee hooker made the mighty travelling?"

"Good for you," called some one. "That's a proper one for yourself, Tomas."

Tomas McLir merely smiled satirically to himself, like one who could well put up with a discomfiture in his turn.

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was clean decision in the smith's mind as he stepped into the night. He went at once toward the river. He was determined to see Eoghan and to talk with him.

The moonlight lit his way. It lay like a white sheath over the land, and threw the nearer world into an astonishing clearness while hanging exquisite veils about the distance. Each line in the land over which he trod was clearly cut; every stone stood out with startling distinctness, shining whitely at its crown, and set in a relief of black shadow; the darkness of the bogs was menacing where the shadows of the hummocks fell across it; and illumined by a peculiar surface-brightness where the moonlight swept it. There were no half-lights; it was all bold relief: so much so that a traveller over rough ground, as Seumas was, lost all sense of depth in a common blackness, and sprang over every shadow as though it were a chasm, while where the light fell on it the land assaulted him with its nearness. He trod as warily beside the river as though the night were pitchy black. Yet the same light was like a mist in the clear air, behind which the mountains shone unimaginally beautiful. They were like spirits communing with one another at a distance, in a world into which a glimpse had been given. As Seumas went, jumping along the rough *boithirin*, he kept looking at them as if he were expecting them to change their positions, or become finally transfigured, with a fear catching at his heart. He had a thousand times seen them just as they were now—near, yet in another world—but they always gave him the haunting thought that he perceived more than his senses could tell him, and that this world that he saw, instead of being more illusory, was less illusory, less insubstantial and less a phantasm, than the world to which his senses had accustomed him. He felt that certain laws operated from that world into this, weaving themselves in and out of the laws he was acquainted with that gave extraordinary weight to the occurrences they influenced.

Deep scepticism with regard to himself prevailed in him as he stubbornly continued his journey. The moonlit night

washed his mind so clean that emotions and resolves barely concluded seemed age-old and impossibly remote. The beauty of the night—the revealed beauty of Earth in a less accustomed guise—so tranquil and calm, like the spinning poise of a world in being, had so far banished time for him that before he had gone a quarter of an hour on his way he had need to call on sheer obstinacy for the continuance of his journey. So aged was the resilient energy of his mind with which he had stepped out of the company at Sean McLir's.

When he came within sight of the cabin he stopped. Eoghan was sitting on a great twisted lump of bog timber on the bank beyond the cabin, outlined against the distance. His elbows were on his knees, his cheeks supported each side by his clenched hands, and he was sitting crouched forward looking intently at the hills. Despite the oddity of the figure on the gnarled block of timber in the moonlight Eoghan's was but the pose of a man deep in thought, or rapt in meditation; but there was something about that figure that held Seumas in a catch of fear. His immediate thought was to return before he was discovered. He felt as if he had trodden into some place where he was being watched; and he looked round quickly and apprehensively. His heart was beating just as if someone was striking him with violent blows. Yet the years were full on him; that is to say, if his mind's energy could pass quickly its obstinacy remained long; and he held to his place stubbornly, muttering curses on himself for a fool.

He waited to see if Eoghan would move. That, it seemed to him, would release the sense of a forbidden place into which he had stepped. But Eoghan sat crouched there—with the moonlight falling on him, outlined against the distance, twisted like the roots on which he sat—without the least move, bleached of colour by the moonlight. He looked as if he had sat long without the least move; and so Seumas struck down into the intervening hollow in which the cabin had been built, obstinacy in every line of his back as he went.

A wise instinct urged him to leave the *boithirin*, go round about the house, and approach Eoghan from the front. Accidents might happen if he kept the *boithirin* and came upon Eoghan from the rear. He went past the house, across the bare piece of earth cut years before for the new

house, leapt the mearing and came across the bog towards Eoghan.

He stood immediately under Eoghan, and Eoghan did not see him, or move eye or limb. There was something uncanny about that raptness. Yet the very movements of the smith's body were abruptly eloquent of his stubbornness. He moved immediately before Eoghan, poised himself resolutely on his two legs, and held out his hand toward him.

"You're heartily welcome to this place, lad," he said.

For some seconds Eoghan gave no heed to the words. Then he started, and a convulsive shudder shook him. His hands fell from his cheeks to the timber beside him, feeling for limbs of the roots; and he stared down at Seumas with his eyes distended and a wild light shining in them. He rather looked toward Seumas than at him. He was like a man approaching rather than a man who was there. He descended slowly from the root, and for a moment it looked as though he were coming to strike Seumas.

"I'm believing that now," he said in a hard, strained voice.

With the live flesh of a man before him, Seumas lost all his fear. He was uncomfortable, but not afraid. Moreover, he seemed oddly to understand perfectly the causes of Eoghan's strangeness, abruptness, even enmity of manner; and so he stretched his hand to him again to signal the fact that it had not yet been shaken.

Eoghan shook it slowly, without any relaxation of his cold hostility.

"*Céad failte romhat; cead failte, a mhic,*" said Seumas. "I'm just after learning of your return, and I was thinking this the most aptest time to be putting the hand to you, with the heart that is like the thorns that do be lightsome in the spring, before a day would be putting oldness on the news."

"Is that so?" said Eoghan distantly, looking askance at him.

It was hard to converse with a man so cold and so aloof, so hostilely strange; and Seumas lowered himself to a stubborn dignity that matched with the mood opposing him. He was not at all easy, but that he was also not offended proved that the heart of understanding was in him.

"I didn't see you passing the road," said Seumas calmly. "I'd have been surprised rightly enough to have seen you passing the road."

"That is so," said Eoghan. And then after a time he added: "I didn't come that ways." And after a further silence he added again: "It was back the heath I came travelling."

Whether he caught it by the implication of Eoghan's words, or whether he took it out of Eoghan's mind, Seumas' thought narrowed sharply to the idea of Nancy. His mind suddenly gave him the picture of Nancy's cottage and the heath behind it; and he looked stolidly over the moonlit bog.

"There's a kind of talking now," he said, "and you back to Maolan presently."

Eoghan laughed a short, abrupt laugh.

"Why wouldn't there be?" he said.

"It's queer talking an odd time, and then it'd be the kind of talking any person would be making when there's no other sort of thing to be doing but to be achieving the news. It's the way every place must be talking and conjecturing and keeping the mind occupied with some idle thing. Haven't the big cities of the world the parliaments and politics and people that never did a hand's turn and have great need to be talking and inventing? That's the very way it is now. And there's people at gable-ends too——"

"Didn't they give pensions?" said Eoghan with startling abruptness. And then he added: "And they gave asylums too, for the making of madness and for setting the wise astray in their wits."

Seumas looked carefully at Eoghan, who seemed, however, as peculiar and as strange as he had been before these abrupt pertinencies.

"Well now," said Seumas, "there's wisdom and there's foolishness resulting from all kinds of talk. It's in the disposition of things that there's no person can be saying what will be turning up next if one would be always talking. The more the talk the poorer the chances. The most foolishest kind of person would be saying wise words if he but said few words; and a person dropping many words will be falling over them into foolishness, surely."

Eoghan stared at Seumas with a hard alertness. For the

first time his attention seemed to be within the conversation; or at least upon the personality mainly conducting it. But it was only for a moment. His glance flashed wonderingly upon Seumas and turned again over the bog towards the hills.

Seumas himself seemed to feel that his sententiousness wanted some justification. He was silent for a while, like a man who wished to gather together all his forces before he delivered himself. Then he spoke, with a considered weight of opinion.

"A person," he said, "that would be walking the road, where anyone could be beholding, or viewing, or regarding his travels, such ways as he would be going, and not to be going by heaths and the backways of the houses, would not be having any person to confound him with the mischievous nets that do be all times made by the tongues of idle peoples, whether there should be causes or whether there should not be causes. You'll be excusing me, Eoghan O'Clery, if I be any ways plain of my speech. I do be speaking a good word for you, as you had a right to be expecting of me; but if a person was to be heedful of himself and criticising himself there wouldn't be the leavings for the simplicity of the people to be contorting; there wouldn't now. That's what I was burdened in my mind to be saying now. It's that was the very thing."

Having steered himself with some difficulty to a conclusion he stopped, and held himself in a stubborn rigidity of position with a steadfast decision manifest all over him to say no more since his mind now was clear in that particular at any rate.

During his speech Eoghan had been looking, as before, over the fields. There was no seeming change in him. An acute observer would hardly have noticed the sharp tension that passed over his body. And he remained so for some time. Then he turned slowly and looked sidelong at Seumas. He said nothing, however, but his manner was watchful.

Then the smith, like a man with a pre-determined journey to go, began again, more awkwardly.

"I don't know how will we ever rally round. It's heavy and it's hard to know how should a person lift himself up from the thronging sloughs. It's strange knowing how any person should. There'll be queer tales and stories that were running through all the people's tongues the time you were

travelling, that'll rise now, that'll put their heads up now, that will be very bold and broad through the place. It was the like of some lad coming from England or Scotland. It was the queer story about himself that did be in that house. It was the very extravagant tale of his woman abiding yet in some madhouse, and of weighty scandals, and so forth. There were some that believed it, and there were some that wouldn't give any heed to it, and there were more that both believed it and also didn't. A person couldn't be heeding every tale, surely; but likewise a person couldn't be putting a thing away and it with a great likelihood in some other place. An open mind's a great virtue if it has the way of a mind that's closed itself full many a time." He stopped wondering if he had justly come to his end. He seemed to be very doubtful. Then he decided that if he had not found the end, the end had at least found him; and slowly settled into the rigid manner of a man with no more to say.

Eoghan was looking over the fields as if he saw something in the distance that occupied all his attention. Thus when he spoke at last his words seemed to have no application to the monologue that had ceased.

"It's true now," he said, and his voice was hard and tense, with a kind of studied care.

"Is that so?" Seumas said, without turning to him.

"I'm after seeing the old woman."

"Did you now?"

"I did."

Seumas said no more; and Eoghan was, if it may so be phrased, abstractly tense. Seumas' manner clearly signified the end of all his deliverances; and it was long before Eoghan spoke again.

"There's a kind of curse following, I'm thinking—or maybe it's waiting. It's very apt that's the way it is. There does be fates and dispositions without a doubt. Without a doubt. It's kind of queer to be looking into the middle of things. A person can be seeing things. It's very queer. 'Tis surely."

"There doesn't be such things," said Seumas stoutly, sturdily.

"Maybe there doesn't. Likely enough. There's never any saying. But it's kind of queer."

The silence that followed was the smith's method of giving a studied weight to what he was to say.

“Anyways,” he said, with the air of a man going beyond all controversy to certainty, “a person had a right to be heeding himself middling careful. Likely there’s no fates but what we’d be expecting in the mind. ’Tis very likely now there isn’t.” He spoke more as if to reassure himself than to reassure Eoghan.

But quite distinctly, as from a definitely assignable cause unconnected with Seumas, Eoghan stiffened again into his earlier mood, the effect of which as towards Seumas, his only human company, was one of cold hostility. The smith felt it. He felt as if he were being ejected from that place. He did not go at once. He stayed in silence a short time simply because of the forcible compulsion that was being exerted on him. If go he must he would not go thus: he would choose his time like any free man. Then he bade Eoghan a good-night and peace. Eoghan made some response that he could not hear. And so he turned away down the river.

“I’d a right not to be going to him, and him that way,” he said as he neared the village itself. “I was a middling fool, so I was, to be striking sounds out beside that river.”

CHAPTER XIII.

NEVERTHELESS he had effected his purpose with Eoghan, for all that he went his way guarding himself somewhat cynically against the conviction that he was a fool. To be true, Eoghan did not remember anything in detail of what he had said, but the following morning the memory of his visit became transmitted into a kind of a warning symbol. As he took up his life in Maolan again with the dawn of the day it brooded over him like an action that stood against certain possible outlets of that life, dictating certain other outlets.

He went about the whole of the day seeking to avoid the recurring thought of Nancy; but it was always with him; and it was with him, by the terrible irony that psychology so regularly presents, because of the very warning, and even in the very degree in which that warning was successful. And just as he avoided the thought of her so he avoided every chance of meeting her.

Those who watched mischievously to see what would happen, though they heard rumours of James Burke's wildness, and though they saw him and heard strange things from him, saw nothing in Eoghan but a man who calmly took up the course of his life where it had been left before he went from the island. They saw him busy mending his cabin and putting it in order; they saw him drive fresh cattle and sheep back from the fair; and tend them on the hills as before; and all things defied criticism. They did not, however, see the agony of war in Eoghan's mind and emotions; an agony in great part created by the prohibition that stood against him, and by standing against him creating (as it is the first great law of prohibition always to create) a maddening desire to trample it under foot.

So a conflict ensued, within and without. That which was enacted within the man, fierce though it was, became less than the curious duel that thereby began to be conducted in tense silence across heath and bog.

Nancy had, after her first few days' anger against Eoghan, begun calmly and somewhat contemptuously to expect his return. The heat of the fire that had sometime burnt him was now on her, was it? Well, he would be discovering in the course of time. He would be discovering how much burning was on her, or whether she had any heat at all; he would be discovering all in good time, so he would, when he came travelling up the heath abroad with a middling hot fire burning in himself. She never doubted his return. It was not coquetry in her. It was not vanity. Nor was it desire. It was perfect faith in her man. She never doubted him; nor did she doubt that part of her knowledge of him. In that her nature exerted itself in a healthy, clean forthrightness, however her thought might play upon it afterwards and bend and use it. In itself it was clean faith. And when Eoghan failed to come she still never doubted him or her knowledge of him; and so she came to hit upon the truth.

At first she waited carelessly about the cottage in the fine summer evenings, with an attentive care nevertheless on the heath above. The day of the curlew-cry she knew was gone; and so it behoved her to be within sight. Then with anger and resentment in her heart she found occasions to haunt the heath itself. She was determined to wreak her vengeance on him for this when at last he would come. As

he still did not come she did not fall back upon doubt, and so she accepted it that he was avoiding her.

Had he come she had meant no more than conversations with him—a resumption, indeed, of the old meetings, less the embraces and accepted love-making. That much she had clearly defined for herself when at last the recrimination in the house forced her from the first thoughtless giving of herself. Maurya's watchfulness had first noticed the new desire for the heath above the house. But her criticism did not make much headway against Nancy's stolid and contemptuous silence. Then James took the same road; but took it with violent crimination. Nancy's pride was hurt to find how hard it became to maintain her stony manner in the face of his complaint, whether querulous or violent. Her mind, to her extreme annoyance, gave him the justice of the position, however violent or porterfully emotional he might be. That was a new ignominy for her, an ignominy that, to her amazement, even stifled resentment and forced her to defiance. She did not defend herself to him. With him she maintained all the exterior calm and cold contempt that had till now been a proper coin for inward things. She defended herself to herself. She did so by stating quite clearly for the satisfaction of her mind what her meetings with Eoghan were to be when he came.

When he did not come she felt she had just cause for complaint. She divined that James—naturally spontaneous, child-like, and very ingenuous, but with the extra spontaneity, child-likeness and ingenuousness bequeathed by the solace to which he so pitifully fled—had made no secret of her watchings on the heath. Symptoms of this reached her, indeed, in the cautions of the neighbours conveyed to her by Maurya. This she had incurred (against which she was not altogether so proof as she could have wished herself) for him, she thought; and yet there was no sign of him. She was hot and angry and revengeful; and Maurya Flaherty and James Burke found her still less of a habitable companion.

Then one day a comfort seemed to come. She saw Eoghan passing on the road toward Islean. She went singing out of the door up to the heath. She had caught his glance up toward her; but she had not looked toward him, for she knew that he would perceive what she meant. She was amazingly glad and happy. There was no thought of re-

venge in her mind. All that was melted in an utter joy, for other desires were coming to a consummation in her than those she had taken into her thought. Her song was as glad and as free as that of a lark. Her coldness was melted in the warm rush of her emotions. Her being yearned in her. So utterly different was she that one would hardly have recognised her as the same woman of any part of her life. Her very face was transfigured. Her eyes were bright and glad. Her whole nature glowed in her expression. She went springing up the heath lightly and happily with a cleanness and brightness and fullness of life such as she had never known.

From the top of the heath she looked down to the road that bent round from the further side of Islean, watching for the figure that would come up the hill to her. Her whole nature, suddenly completed and beautiful, reached out for a sight of that figure. But it did not come. She waited and waited, careless of time or discovery, with a new patience of joy running calmly, and yet with a deep thrill of excitement, in every part of her body. Her flesh yearned for the sight that would meet her eyes. Her spirit yearned. But the sight did not meet her eyes. Slowly, and against her passionate will, mortification (in the veriest meaning of the word) overcame her. Her being, that had been so full and completed an hour before, disintegrated into anger, rage, jealousy, hard hate, vindictiveness, spiteful fury, and, what was at the bottom of them all, covetousness. It was as if the hour had come which her life and her nature had awaited; and now passed relentlessly. She wept passionately; she tore at the heather with her teeth; she cried aloud with hoarse inarticulate rage rolling on the ground; and that night the mother and husband who awaited her with angry reproaches were terrified of the living fury that returned in her stead.

So the duel became tense through all the days. She knew that Eoghan evaded her, and she hunted him. She hunted him as by compulsion. She hunted him cunningly and inflexibly. She took to visiting friends and relatives as far as Bailawnach; and with the deftest skill she gathered such hints as she could of Eoghan's movements, and waylaid him. Her lack of success only made her the more sleepless of pursuit.

So she learned once that Eoghan had gone to the fair at the mainland. The next morning, with a craft strangely

different from her accustomed defiance, she mentioned Mary Quilter's name incidentally enough. Then, as if prompted by that, she wove Mary Quilter's name into the fragmentary conversation that flowed from the first mention. (The coming of craft and intrigue in her was a curious thing to observe.) No sooner had James started on his way than she abruptly decided to visit Mary Quilter forthwith, and changing her skirt and snatching her best shawl she was gone, with the professed determination to catch James and go on the road with him. Maurya, who had hardly been allowed a moment's space to have her say, was utterly bewildered, not merely by the first intention itself but not less by the desire to go the road with James and the manifest haste to put that desire into effect.

Mary Quilter was not less surprised. She had good cause to be so indeed. This was Nancy's first visit since her wedding, and this quaint hour of the day seemed to betoken friendship. How then was it to be explained that Nancy was in so excited and irritable a state? She seemed all the time on the edge of a violent quarrel, always as if she would break up suddenly into a violent eruption. Tadhg was away on the land at harvest, and Mary passed in and out from the shop to the house placidly wondering at the girl. At last the expected outburst came. It had seemed to be deliberately held in check for some time when it flared up.

"Ach, I'm ruined talking to you, Mary Quilter," Nancy said, rising and snatching her shawl. "I'm hating the sight of you with my two eyes, so I am, you that did me the great hurt that I'll not forgive easy."

Before Mary Quilter could reply she was gone; so Mary with mild indignation addressed the place where she had been.

"You'd a right to be resting in your own house, and not to be coming insulting a person. There's no goodness to be coming from you I'm doubting."

Had she looked down the road, however, she would a mile away have seen a man driving a drove of sheep down the road. It was Eoghan. Nancy had seen him pass round the bend of the road coming from Port as she had fidgetted about from the hearth to the door and back again.

Nancy went calmly and stolidly till she had put the last house behind her. Then she quickened her steps. She had the length of the road from Coisabhaun to Islean in which

to catch Eoghan. There were none to observe her. Everybody was at work on the land, and there was no arable land between the loch and the sea where the road lay. Any old men or women not at work were in the houses behind her or before.

Yet she had her task before her, for Eoghan always swung forward at a great rate even with sheep to drive. Now he went at more than his customary pace because he was excited and ill at ease. He expected to see Nancy above Islean, and the memory of his long battle with himself to resist her obvious invitation some weeks before renewed itself like a fire in his bones. However, he had now the sheep to protect him and demand his attention; and, thus protected, a hunger just to see her came upon him.

So they went forward over the road. She, feeling he would hasten to avoid her if he knew of her approach, hurried to come upon him without warning. She went over the grass-grown sand beside the road lest her footsteps should be heard. He hurried forward very perturbedly, hungry to see her, and protecting himself and excusing himself by the presence of his sheep even as he submitted himself with a wild yearning joy to his desire. At that moment, so wonderfully did she seem to stand before him waiting at the house, he would have thrown everything aside and gone to her before a host. He hurried on with a fretting excitement in his blood.

Then, just a short distance from Islean itself, he heard his name called quite clearly from behind. There was something of pathetic desperation in the cry. He was just about to wheel round to see what it was when he checked himself. He understood in an instant that she was behind him and following him. In the turmoil of his mind the first thought that stood out was a wonder how she had come there and what brought her there. That led rapidly to the idea of her following him down the length of the road; and the picture of a Nancy waiting in the sunlight shining from the sea about her cottage, and watching for him, changed to the picture of a Nancy hastening along the road to catch him. And with the change of the mental picture there came the change of its emotional associations.

So he walked along the road stiffly, like a man not daring to see some undesired thing behind him, in a turmoil of body and soul, not knowing what to do. Again he heard his

name called, and he could almost gauge her exact distance from him; but he still went on stiffly. It seemed to him that she must guess that he had heard by the very hold of his body, but he was powerless to alter it. He did not resolve not to see her; he just walked onward in a stiffness that was as much mental as physical; and when he reached Islean and realised that it was now too late to do anything he could have broken down. He left his sheep and ran back along the road, but she was gone; and he knew well enough if he had followed her up the heath how she would have received him.

Yet the incident cleared his mind. He knew nothing of how it had affected her, or what those in the house suffered from her in the days that followed; but it seemed to cut him clear from her now without any further question. It brought him a despair and an utter dejection that nothing could lift; but it was the despair of an issue that had been finally, even if fatefully, resolved.

It was then, when he hardly threw a glance behind him, but looked grimly and hopelessly ahead, that a curious chance threw him right across her path.

The summer had matured wonderfully and cloudlessly past the days of sultry deadness to a mellow glory that held sway instead of accustomed autumn. The sea swayed smoothly or rippled lightly through all the days. The sun strode over the mountains with golden feet and made a golden path in the western ocean week after week, and hardly found a cloud to disguise him, slowly sinking to the southward. The purple bloom of the heather faded from the mountains, and the hills became brown and dark again, but a purple bloom covered them each evening as the light of the sinking sun glowed over their sides through air that shone like wine—through air, indeed, that was like wine to the senses. The colours everywhere were rich and mellow, though crystal-clear as always. Such an Indian summer had never been. The summer itself had been sultry and oppressive, ripening to this richness; and now as the moon matured and faded the very splendour began to grow ominous of the break that was daily expected.

Eoghan had been over to a man who lived on the hills between Coisabhaun and Port to buy some potatoes for his winter. It was dark as he returned, the moon not yet having risen. As he came across the road to Islean the north-

eastern sky was bright with a moon that was rising behind the hills; yet Islean was dark, and he wondered at the noise of laughter that came to him from the green. As he swung round the bend of the road into the village the decayed moon lifted over a shoulder of the hills and he saw a cluster of lads before Antony Clancy's, laughing at a man who went shouting drunkenly up the road reeling from side to side.

When he neared the lads he gathered from their talk that the man ahead of him was James Burke.

"He'll escape out of it yet, so he will. He'll go tripping into the ditch, by dad. He will surely, by the oath of my soul. Let you heed him now."

So he heard one of the lads say; and then another replied:

"Will he, hell? The car'll be to the corner speedy now. They'll be meeting sure. There's no avoiding. Look at the boyo will you? Isn't he the great traveller?"

So the talk went on excitedly.

"The Master'll be getting his own lesson now. He'll have his schooling. There'll be great times in it."

"Ah, 'tis the end o' it. It's the reckoning of him. He was middling decent, mind you. Let's go warn him now."

"Will we, hell? Let him take his cargo, and we to take the funning. He's over now."

"Well he isn't then. 'Twas only a middling strange caper he's after. Let you look at him."

"Esht. Let's be stirring. Father Hinnissey's at us now."

Eoghan saw them wheel in a body and heard them running through the lanes of the village. He turned and saw Father Hinnissey's car just disappearing behind the cluster of cottages at the bend of the road, and then looked quickly to see the figure reeling drunkenly up the road ahead of him, talking loudly and shouting as it went.

It was dismissal for James Burke as clear as anything could be clear. It might be said that dismissal meant the removal of James Burke from the island, and consequently of James Burke's wife. Or, here was a chance to meet Nancy fairly; or, to win gratitude from the house. A thousand subtle and complex motives might be suggested why Eoghan should help, if indeed he could. Yet the thing in his mind was an exceedingly simple, outstanding appeal. Everything was swept clean out of Eoghan's mind but the fact that here

was a man at a difficult pass who required assistance, as he himself might some stray time be needing it. The appeal, at that moment to Eoghan, was from man to man; and all personalities faded out of his mind as he strode rapidly up the incline.

The moon shone clearly on him as he went, lifted above a shoulder of a distant hill and wearing old. Thus, when James Burke heard the hurrying steps behind him, and turned heavily to see who it was, Eoghan was outlined clearly before him, menacing indeed in the intentness and speed of his approach. Eoghan saw James make an effort to rally himself and stand to a guard.

" 'Tis you are the dirty devil, and is it a trick now? " he heard him say, as he lurched forward toward him with clenched fists.

Eoghan's fists were clenched too, for his plan was formed in his mind. He swung his left arm with the movement of his approach and struck James on the point of his chin. He saw James spin over, lifted into the air with the force of the blow, strike against the mearing of the field, and roll heavily to the bottom of the ditch in the deep shadow, as he turned sharply round to see the car whirl round the bend of the road.

He went stolidly up the road. When the car came beside him he heard it draw up, and a voice said :

" Who's that there? "

" It's myself. "

" Was that yourself I heard singing and shouting just now? "

" It was not. It was some lads ran through the village. "

" Who were they, did you know? "

" Sorra one. "

" I believe, indeed, you know well. Do you mind any of them? "

" Sorra one I'm saying, and sorra one I'm meaning. "

" Let me put a hold on them, that's all. Shameless behaviours. Let you keep clear of the drink yourself. It's the curse of any man. " And the car drove on through the village.

When the road was clear Eoghan turned to the figure in the ditch. It was still insensible as he drew it out upon the road, and defied his slaps and clouts and efforts, rough and otherwise, to arouse it.

So with an excitement rising in his blood he propped it against the mearing, drew the arms over his shoulders, lifted it on his back, and set off to bear it to Nancy.

Bending under his burden, he could not see if any saw him as he went. Indeed, he was insensible to everything but his journey's end. The thought of that was like a fever throughout his body, and he reeled and stumbled under his burden with unaccustomed weakness. Yet he was not aware that he did so. He was hardly aware of his burden. He was quite unaware of the way he went, or who might be observing him. Had any addressed him it is doubtful whether he would have heard. Certainly he would not have heeded. He was oblivious of everything but the goal ahead of him, and the excitement in his veins.

So he stumbled up the *boithirin*. At the door he bent low to support the body fully while he loosed a hand to unlatch the door. Then he strode into the house.

Turning his body, he let James slip off his back and fall like a sack upon the floor.

"There's your man now," said he to Nancy, who with Maurya had risen at his entry.

He hardly looked at Nancy; but fear and a wild desire to be gone suddenly seized him, and he strode quickly toward the open door, when he heard Nancy call him.

"Eoghan," she said.

He turned toward her.

"What would I be doing with him?" she said helplessly.

He looked up at her, to meet her gaze; and they stood staring at one another across the house, utterly unconscious of the stretched figure on the floor between them.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was Maurya aroused them.

"You'd a right to give a heed to himself," she said, breaking the spell that held them all, and going over to James' body stretched senseless on the floor.

It was curious how her manner and the inflexion of her voice addressed the whole content of her remark to Nancy, and omitted Eoghan as though he were not in the house.

He turned slowly to go. The hypnotism of his long glance with Nancy held him yet and dazed his mind. He had a sense of all time meeting in that gaze. A knowledge, a profound assured knowledge of something that answered all the questionings of the past years, was in him now, without his at all knowing what that knowledge was. Lines and roads seemed now in perfect planning to converge and meet; and while the instinct of that brought him a sense of decision it brought him also a sense of fatefulness. Yet, bemused though he was, Maurya's manner had its effect upon him; and he was turning to go when once again he heard Nancy address him.

"Will you put a hand to him and lift him to the bed?" There was a sharpness in her voice by which she quite emphatically asserted her position as mistress in the house.

"Let you not stir him now. Put some water across him. He's not hurted much; it's mainly the porter that has him away." He spoke quietly and calmly, and it did not occur to him to say how James came by his hurt.

Maurya got some water, and he took it from her and bent beside James and dashed it over his head, cuffing him smartly on the cheeks. As this made no impression he began to loosen his collar and tie, and Nancy knelt on the other side of the body to assist him. She did so in a kind of fascination, hardly knowing what she did. Neither of them took hold of the other; neither of them ceased in the work at which they were occupied; and from without, save for a certain monotony in the rhythm of their actions, none would have seen more in their joint service than its outward semblance; but their hands were always touching, and when they did so a madness went into each of their veins. The very monotony of rhythm was born of the effort each put forward not to hold from occupation with the prostrate figure, not to give undivided delight in the other's presence. The rhythm was the control of ecstasy; and so became a kind of ritual.

Nevertheless, there was this difference between them: Eoghan was occupied with, and concerned with, James Burke's recovery of consciousness, whereas Nancy was only occupied with the work at which Eoghan laboured.

Maurya watched them with a vague sense of trouble, perplexed to know what to do; and her trouble did not diminish when at length James sighed heavily, opened his eyes in a

mazed and stupid way, mumbled something incoherently, and then closed his eyes in drunken stupidity.

"He'll be stirring now," said Eoghan.

"Do you think, will he?" Nancy asked in an automatic way.

"He will surely. 'Tis only the porter now. The knock is over. He's rightly after the knock itself, and he's perplexed after the porter."

"What was that knock?" Maurya asked sharply.

"Wasn't it the knock myself gave him?" Eoghan said, looking up at her.

He stared unflinchingly at her to outface her hostility, and when he turned from her again James was gazing at him with round eyes full of amazement. He was like a man trying to focus his mind from a distance toward something so incredulous that he waited before loosing his anger against it. He sat up; with the same stare of bewilderment he raised himself to a sitting position, with his legs stretched out before him; and then swung his arm round heavily and struck Eoghan full in the face.

Hardly had he done so than he received a stinging clap on the cheek from Nancy; and he shook his head and turned slowly round to see her kneeling on the ground staring at him with a flush of anger on her cheeks. He looked at her with puzzled remonstrance. It was plain that the two figures kneeling one each side of him troubled him by their relation to one another. He lifted his hand as if to clutch the thing that evaded him, and then struck her with it on the shoulder petulantly.

"Let you stop that," said Eoghan roughly, shaking him by the arm.

The jolting seemed to arouse him.

"Is it you?" said he. "Yourself that put the hand on me back the road, hell's curse to you so? Would you come crafty and attack me, and I with a drop taken to quench the soreness of my life? Would you so? By the power of my soul, but there's attacking and attacking, so there is. I'll be the equal of that blow, so I will. I'll not regard it passing, and I easy in my shoes. Damn it, will I."

As he spoke he raised himself to his knees, and then raised himself to his feet unsteadily, Eoghan also rising as he did so. James swayed about for a while, and then released himself to the motion that was at least a securer

business than standing. He rushed forward, like an ejected missile, with his arms whirling, and struck Eoghan on the cheek with the full force of his clenched fist.

Eoghan made no effort to evade the blow, or to retaliate after it. He stood there just calmly watching James. His quiescence was partly owing to the inequality of the conflict (an inequality, for that matter, that was not so very pronounced, since James was arousing himself with his action, and had great strength in his thick-set frame), and partly the attitude of a man towards another who had acquired the right to strike him. Again James rushed at him, and again Eoghan calmly received the blow, the two women watching James even as Eoghan did. Then a thing occurred that transformed the conflict. James was breathing heavily after his exertions, and a little unsettled by Eoghan's passive reception of his attack.

"You dirty devil with herself," he said. "There isn't one but knows the dirty character you have earned, and that dirty commonality there that has my life destroyed."

Having roused himself again he plunged once more at Eoghan. But now Eoghan was aroused. James had gripped him low before he had been fully aware of his attack; but he took his hold where he could; and the two of them swayed and scrambled about the house, ferocity matching with ferocity. They crashed against the dresser, and brought the delf in fragments on the floor. They fell over the bench, broke their hold, rose and rushed at one another again. Time and time again James lifted Eoghan clean from the ground and tried to throw him, but Eoghan, with the agility of a cat, had always a foot thrown out to regain his hold on the ground. In reply, Eoghan, with the disadvantage of height and a higher grip, put forth all his strength to force James backward upon the ground; and when that occurred there would only be the sound of the two men breathing heavily or cursing each other in hoarse whispers. But James always managed, late or early, to slip away sideways from the force of the thrust, whereupon Eoghan would fly forward dragging James with him, and the two would whirl round and round in a clatter of feet. Sometimes it was impossible to watch their feet so rapidly would their legs fly in and out in the effort to grip and trip each other, or find new levers, footholds, or legholds. Sometimes they would hang tensely in an issue of their strength,

and the only sound to be heard would be their gasps. At other times they would spin about, hang poised an instant, and whirl again, throwing each other, righting their disadvantages and seeking for fresh advantages, manœuvring and scheming with furious rapidity, crashing against furniture and walls, and clattering with their heavy boots over the floor, while all the time James only grunted heavily, and Eoghan could be heard saying, with each fresh effort of his: "You liar. You devil's own spit of a liar."

At first the women had attempted to stop them, but the linked fury of the two men had crashed into them, driving them headlong, or swept past them, till, at length, afraid for themselves, they escaped and watched with a fascination of terror from the doorway of the further room. As soon could they have thought of harnessing a tempest. A mad fury was loose in the two men that had to expend itself. James had the advantage of an older resentment, of a fury that had been nursed and had awaited the opportunity to loose itself: the advantage of the first, the unloosed and attacking ferocity. Eoghan fought under the mixed disadvantage of being in the other man's house and answering the other man's ferocity; which things hampered the more because they were really one.

Moreover, James' drink helped him now. So that the differing strength of the two men matched itself now in the conditions under which they fought; and they whirled and sped about the house in a balance of forces that seemed never to change in favour of either. Most of the delf was in fragments on the floor. The chairs were upturned. The table was twisted astray across the two women. The bench was broken across the house. And still the men fought on, breathing heavily, and cursing each other, while the women bewailed the day.

At last Eoghan gained the balance of strength. Standing in the middle of the house, with his feet planted apart and his legs bent at the knees to get the strength of his thighs to bear, he lifted James time and time again from the ground in the attempt to throw him, while James cursed freely. Eoghan was like a man who gripped the floor with his toes while he lifted and tossed his burden. Yet, gripping from above, he was powerless to effect his purpose. James clung on to him from below, and always landed on his legs. There was the venomous anger of a thwarted man in Eoghan's

face. "To hell with you, will you go, grabber and liar?" he shouted, and, tearing James away by sheer strength, he lifted him and flung him across the house. But James, as he went, flung out a hand and gripped Eoghan by the collar, and the two of them went sprawling across the house. There, lying on the floor, they rolled over and over, each battering at the other's face with clenched fists.

The women ran forward now. Maurya ran behind Eoghan and pulled him away, while Nancy jumped between them and thrust James from her regardless of his blows.

The two men were bleeding freely, their faces already hardly recognisable when at length they stood on the floor of the house glaring at each other with the women between them.

"Hadn't you a shame striking himself in his own house?" Maurya demanded of Eoghan angrily.

"Didn't he go attacking him firstly?" Nancy said, catching hold of her mother by the arm and pushing her aside. "Let you stand away now. I'll have no word put against him, and he enduring a drunken streeler welting him before he'd put a hand to him to square the reckoning."

James looked at the three of them like a man beyond his depth, with an accumulating weight of tragedy gathering above him.

"Is it taking his part?" he said.

"Ah, is it," said Nancy, stepping toward Eoghan.

There was none of the angry woman about her now, but an amazing decision and dignity in that storm-tossed scene. Again, and quite remarkably, she asserted her dominance in the house, till Maurya, standing beside her, seemed even physically smaller.

"Is it me you married, or isn't it now?" asked James, stirring himself to anger.

"Well might you be asking now?" Nancy said. "Wasn't himself my man before you came troubling me and trapping me the way of a person wouldn't know which way to escape? He was now. And I was a middling fool that time to let you terrify me and bewilder my understanding. It's little pleasure you had from your trapping, James Burke, and I'd be sorry for you wasn't it that a person does be getting what they're paying for, if it's a lucky bag itself. Things is now what they did be all times; and there's no change now nor never but the very thing that was always in it."

James looked on her in broken helplessness. Then a great cry broke from him; a cry that rang through the house, terrible in its agony, terrible in its despair and awe; a cry that went upward in protestation of its cause. The realisation of a broken life was in that cry; and the tears of strong men were an idle grief beside its utter desolation. It was pitifully pitiful. It quenched his hearers; but James had eyes only for Nancy. He looked on her, not in any anger, but as on a necessary part of his life utterly beyond his reach, that he now realised had always been beyond his reach; and his bruised face was twisted with pain and longing.

Then he sprang wildly toward the door, flung it open, and went clattering down the *boithirin*.

The other three looked at one another abashed; rather guiltily avoiding a direct glance. They had the silence of those who were responsible for the tragedy they had witnessed. Then Maurya spoke:

"You'd a right to follow him to see he wouldn't be hurting himself," she said to Eoghan.

"'Tis no saying what place he would be. Antony Clancy's house is closed now, and he wouldn't be there, so he wouldn't," said Nancy dully.

There was an uneasy silence between them for some time, which became almost intolerable before Eoghan broke it.

"I'd best be stirring anyways," he said, going through the open door into the moonlit night.

CHAPTER XV.

PADRAIC McLIR made a fine figure pitting potatoes in the declining daylight, with the sea shining like burnished bronze behind him, his burly body bending rhythmically over his straight long-handled spade. The black bog where his spade had cut it, gleamed with a dull purple in the saffron glow of the day's end. There was a violet glow over the whole earth, wrapping the hills and land like a cloak whose folds and waves gave it a large rhythm in its shading. The sea, where it was not bronze, had a delicate opal clarity that melted with the sky. It was a beautiful evening, manifestly an autumn evening despite the summer splendour of the

sun, and the only break in the cloudless sky was a heavy mass at the south-west upon the horizon.

Preoccupied with his work, Padraic did not notice Martin McLir come up behind him till Martin spoke.

"These be great days," said Martin.

"Well, they are now," said Padraic, straightening his body.

"I doubt we'll have to be paying heavy for them yet," said Martin, looking at the dull mass of cloud in the south-west.

"We will surely. We'd be expecting it."

"'Twas too fine in the summer altogether. There'll be a bad price for that. It'll be a coarse winter I'm thinking."

"Well, it will now. It'll be a bad winter surely."

"There's never any pleasurable thing a person wouldn't have to be paying for heavy. 'Tis the way of it. 'Twas all times the same way I doubt."

"That's so now. We'd have to be paying."

Martin had his spade over his shoulder, and Padraic took up his coat from the ground and put it on. The two of them made their way through the land with slow leisured strides.

"It was a good harvest surely. There'll be dry turf and a bit of salt herring anyways, if the praties are only poorly," Padraic said.

"That is so, troth. There's good things and there's bad things, and they're sort of mixed. 'Tis a bad business with the Master now."

"'Tis now," said Padraic.

They strode on peacefully across the land, through the beautiful evening. Bailawnach beneath them was wrapt in blue turf-smoke, that rose up from each white cabin in straight columns, and then drifted eastward.

"They have his body salvaged from the loch at Islean this morning that was in it," Martin said.

"Is that so?" asked Padraic, turning to him, astonishment and trouble labouring to become articulate in him.

"Was it dead he was?"

"It was dead enough. 'Twas a strange bed for him, the poor creature."

"Was it designed so, or only accidentally?" There were a touch of awe in Padraic's voice, as though he intruded in asking such a question.

"'Tis hard to be saying indeed. It's said there were marks a person would be making, and he slipping. Likely

he was fanciful, with porter on him and a fill of trouble, and wasn't able to rectify himself."

"God rest his soul," said Padraic, lifting his cap.

"He'll do so surely in His goodness," said Martin. "It'd be a queer thing for a person to be troubled in the big world and also such time as he goes out of it, mind you. The Master was a queer playboy, so he was. He'd a right to cease from the drink."

Padraic was wrapt in thoughts that he could not by any means bring to coherence.

"I wasn't hearing anything," he said after a time. "I was labouring beyond since I took the breakfast." He stopped, dissatisfied, for that was not what he had wished to say.

"There's queer stories travelling, that a person would be hard-set to believe half of them," said Martin. "Seumas went backward to Eoghan O'Clery to-day. He was rarely troubled."

"The smith, is it?"

"It was then. He's acquainted with that fellow. They have him mixed in it."

"There's no harm attached to him, I believe," said Padraic, with an emphasis of voice that he failed to get into the form of his sentence.

"There might not be indeed. There's queer ways with him, but I hadn't much acquaintance with him."

So they came to the path at which they would need to part. Padraic turned, expecting Martin to leave him; but Martin went with him thoughtfully.

"A person," said Martin, "had no right to be kind of curious, but he'd a right not to be amiss in the lot of his neighbours. Do you see?"

"That's so now," said Padraic, and set to work again in troubled silence to make his own thoughts clear to himself.

When they reached the village it seemed to Padraic that he should go and see Eoghan, whom as yet he had not seen since his return. That was how action faced him when he could not frame his thoughts clearly to himself or formulate the puzzling medley of his emotions. But what made his case so much worse was that Seumas had already done this, and so had stopped his only possible outlet. Therefore, when he left Martin McLir in the village he wandered up the river and drifted, rather than willed to go, into his own cabin.

His wife had not come in from work on her own fields, and so he sat in silence and ate the potatoes Mauryeen had cooked for them, shedding their skins in his fingers and munching them in uneasy reflection, seeking to bring to birth the thought with which his brain was in labour. Then he went out into the evening, and looked to see if the bank of cloud in the south-west had risen; to find that it had disappeared. He looked up the river, where he could see a corner of Eoghan's newly-thatched roof, and a vague perplexity came into his eyes. Then he drifted down to the village again; and, drifting still, drifted into Tomas McLir's cottage.

There were only Tomas and Cáit in, and he sat on the bench beside Tomas, with a nod to himself and a blessing to Cáit.

"'Tis a poor job about the Master now," he said.

"Well, he's sleeping easy now, the poor fellow," said Tomas. "There's no molesting him now. It's the same end for the best and the worst."

"The poor fellow," said Cáit from her stool beside the fire. "He had a troublesome time with living, and maybe God gave him rest so, and ease from this out."

"Ach," said Tomas, "it's the queer fair gave every man his wish. Let him rest now with the end that came to it."

"I only have the news with an hour," said Padraic. "It's Martin McLir is after advising me of it."

Padraic had, in fact, come for particulars, partly to help in a matter that should have been no more for him than a startling, yet nevertheless remote piece of news; and Tomas wished to sound him for the very thing he had come seeking. Neither of them being in a position to help the other, their thoughts turned in the same direction. So they sat for an hour in a silence, broken by stray philosophies on the outstanding fact. Then Padraic rose.

"Come now, Tomas," said he.

"Ach, I will not," said Tomas. "I'll not stir."

"Come on now," repeated Padraic, moving across the house.

"Ah, well," said Tomas; "I don't care a damn." And he rose and followed him.

"It's what I was saying," Sean Clancy of Islean was saying as they entered. "He had a lump of that whin-stuff twisted in his hand when they drew him out of the water

this very morning that was in it. Now what was the meaning of that, would you think?" he demanded of the company.

"He was trying to rescue himself, the poor fellow," Sean McLir said, leaning over the bar, and placidly surveying the men.

"Ah, now you have it. The very thing. He was trying to rescue himself." It was evident that Sean Clancy had come specially down from Islean with the latest details of the news; but he did not propose to let it lack a good skin to it. "He was trying for to rescue himself."

He halted with a sense of dramatic value; and Sean McLir took the opportunity to say to Tomas:

"Two bottles, is it?"

"This is mine now," said Padraic, stepping forward. "Let you make it two pints, Sean."

"He was trying for to rescue himself. It was Doctor Boyle pointed that out to the priest. 'Do you think,' says he, 'that such a thing resembles the nature of suicide?' That's what he says, 'Do you think it resembles the nature of suicide?' He's a thinking man, is Doctor Boyle, a very reasonable and conversable man."

"That was a reasonable question now," said one.

"It was a clever and a proper question," interposed Tomas with the weight of his authority: and the houseful assented conformably with its very various character.

"Go on now, Sean," said a younger man. "You're a great bucko, God bless you."

"'And moreover,' says the Doctor," Sean continued, "'it was a fair death he died too, God rest his soul.'"

"Well, 'twasn't too fair now," Tomas interposed. "That was no fair death to be taking." So he maintained his critical detachment.

"Ah, but 'twas that it wasn't foul, I was meaning. It wasn't fair, surely enough. That's true for you now, Tomas McLir. But my meaning was that it wasn't foul."

"Is it yourself that's meaning that, or was it the Doctor?" the younger man broke in again.

Sean Clancy looked at him perplexedly.

"You have me put out of the course of my news now," said he.

"Go on now; go on now, Sean."

"Well," continued Sean, "the Doctor demonstrated,

'twasn't in the nature of suicide he found his death; but 'twasn't in the nature of foulness too, says he." He spoke slowly and thoughtfully at first, as though groping for the theme at which he had been interrupted, with a sudden enlivenment of manner when he struck upon it. "'He died fair,' says he. Fair: that was the very word. He goes then to the very whin-bush where the Master had the branch pulled. As it might be here; he goes; with the whin-bush there, and the water beyond—let you not be stirring your foot, Martin—by Martin's boot beyond, so. 'He died fair,' says he, looking down so—I was there myself, do you see now?—and says he, 'There's no marks of foul play at this identical spot, which there would be was there any foul play in it, but only the roughing of the grass furninst the water, and the land, do you see, as would be most apt for any person reaching forward for to rescue himself. 'And that corresponds,' says he, 'to the marks in the oxters of the Master's coat,' says he, 'which was what put me in the mind of it.' That was clever now. That was a clever bit of business. And with that the priest said he would bury him full and decent. Do you see now?"

"He was a wise one, that Doctor now. Nothing without a patent to it. Good man yourself, Sean: 'tis you can put the skin on it. Here, Sean, let you not be dry, a *mhic*; another pint to it, Sean McLir."

Yet Martin McLir, his foot now liberated from the recital, interrupted by springing to his feet with a question.

"But were there any footmarks treading into the land round about?"

"Were there, hell!" said Sean Clancy, lifting his glass. "What way vould there be footmarks and the ground as hard with the sun as the boot would be meeting with it? 'Tis easy seeing who didn't put a spade to the land yet."

"And what way then would there be marks in his oxters so? Would you tell me that, my handsome man?" It was the young man again.

"There'll be wisdom come with years if a person has a quiet tongue in his youth," said Sean Clancy. "Isn't the land wet furninst the water? Didn't I see that with my own eyes; and hasn't the water that property from ancient times?"

"But tell me now," continued Martin, obstinately holding to his theme, "weren't there great marks of violence on

the Master's face? It's what I heard the sergeant was saying that his face wasn't recognisable from the weight of blows."

"Ah, the sergeant, is it?" said a man in the corner. "Sure aren't the polis in this country getting good pay for doing nothing but stirring trouble for themselves and their masters; and wouldn't they be sure to put their hands to this?"

"That's true for you, Micky," said Sean McLir from behind the counter.

"Those brands of violence is to be accounted for, howsoever," said Martin, not to be turned away thus.

Sean Clancy, having waited for a clear space, now took advantage of it.

"Man dear," said he, "you're out of the road altogether. You're out of the road altogether. You're travelling ungainly. You'd a right to be getting sense and you of a knowledgeable time of life."

"You'll not be saying now that it wasn't Eoghan O'Clery back the river put those same brands and welts on the Master."

"I'll be saying nothing."

"You'll not be denying that now?"

"Nor I won't be denying anything."

"Well then so, it's what I'm saying that should be the cornerstone of everything."

"I'm not gainsaying that either. I'm gainsaying nothing, *a mhic*. But you're travelling ungainly: you've been travelling ungainly evermore, and you'll be travelling ungainly any more, so you will, if you wouldn't give a heed to yourself. Eoghan O'Clery might be making those disfigurements, and Eoghan O'Clery might be the cornerpiece, and yet might he be nothing in it and you to be astray out of the road however. Will you ask me how that such a thing should be? Let you heed me now and find it out, lad. Didn't Father Hinnissey see him yesterday that was, with those brands and disfigurings and defacements and welts and bruises, in short? Well, he did now. I'm hearing him say so to Doctor Boyle, and troth the scholars have the story told in every part of the neighbours."

"That's so now," said Seumas Clancy from his barrel. "The lads found him porter-stretched on the floor in the schoolhouse, with the face of him like a map of all the countries, and they fetched Father Hinnissey to him from

the hill, and he put him out from the school that very identical time. I was back from Port yesterday; and I was hearing."

"The poor fellow," said one. "'Tis little wonderment he took a drop so. He was a decent man, God rest him."

"Well, he wasn't now," said the young man again. "He was a middling poor sort of fellow with the little trotting steps to him like a man wouldn't crush eggs under him."

"He had a habit of walking that way sure enough. That was the habit of him."

"The sergeant's after travelling up the river to Eoghan O'Clery's."

"It was the smith went that ways first, and the sergeant went following him. The speaker was a newcomer; and he spoke as though giving information on a subject that interested him little.

"He would then," said Sean McLir. "These are great times for himself. There'll be crowner's inquests and deposings, and great travellings of the road, so there will, and he the bucko of the feast. He'll likely be earning his payment the times that are in it. Likely he will now. What time was it the Master and Eoghan had the fighting?"

"The night before," Seumas Clancy said, with a sudden concise coherency, and speaking very quietly. "The Master found Eoghan in the house, the lads heard the Master saying before Father Hinnissey brought him out of it to his own house."

"Wait yet," said Sean Clancy. "Wait yet. Easy now. You'll be mistravelling again. Didn't my own Micky see Eoghan O'Clery fetch the Master up the village on his back, and he streeling drunk, full-shot as you might say, bringing him up to his own house from the way of Father Hinnissey passing the very road? He did now. Carry him, he did, like a weighty lump in the moon. He wouldn't be misliking him, doing him that fashion of a turn."

"Ah, he's the great bucko surely, that fellow up the river," the young man broke in again. "Do you mind the night of the Master's wedding? Wasn't he sergeant of the *cleamaraigh* that time, and didn't he curse her on the floor of the house?"

"That's so now," said one. "There wouldn't be peace in it from that time evermore. There couldn't be, man."

Like a man in whom a powerful disinclination stirred so deeply that it lay utterly beyond his self-knowledge, Antony McLir found himself automatically moving out of the house. He heard a sound beside him as he stood outside for a moment; and, turning, he found that old Tomas had followed him.

They walked up the road in silence for a while.

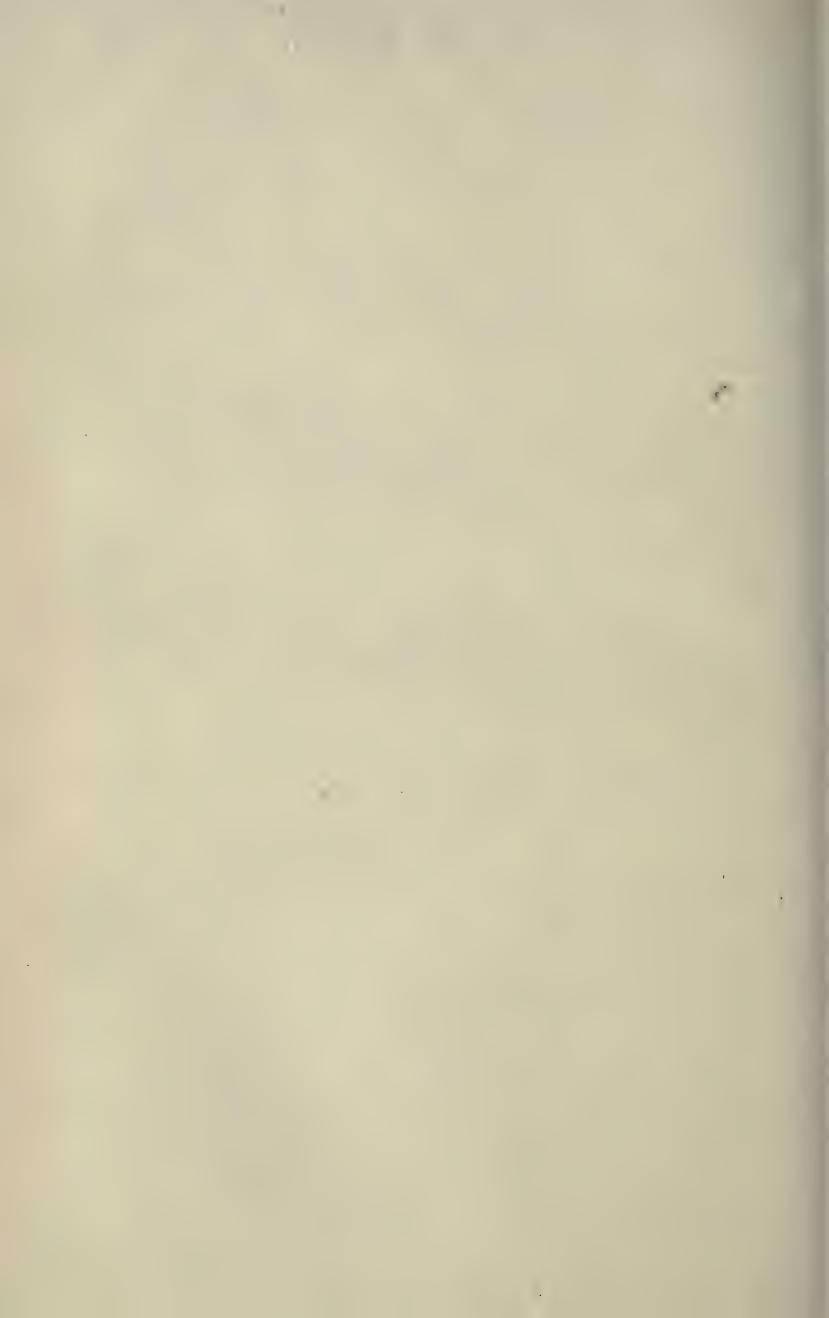
"There's a change in it," said Padraic, his tongue turning to casual things because his mind was so full of a vague trouble that beset his thoughts, yet defied thinking.

"There's a big carry over the moon," said Tomas calmly. "It was to come. Ach, it was too long fine."

"Well, it was now. It was fine long enough."

"Right now. We'll be keeping the fire now. It'll be coarse with the turn of the tide. Ach, you couldn't have it fine always. The wet and the wind is healthy. I wouldn't give a damn but for the sea to be roaring. Good-night to yourself." And he stumped away up the road with rounded shoulders, and his hands thrust into his coat pockets.

"Good-night, Tomas; good-night now," Padraic called after him, watching him disappear through the clouded moonlight. Then he went back troubledly to his house, and in sleep let his troubles roll past him.



PART THE THIRD

CHAPTER I.

EARTH, stretched on her back, had had her fill of ease : now she rose to take her fill of riot. With the turn of the tide, little whirls and eddies of wind rippled over the water and strayed singing along her bosom among the hills. With the passing of the hours, as her brood of men slept, these quickened and thickened and increased ; and heavy banks of clouds, frayed at their edges, sped swiftly across the moon. There was sharp expectancy everywhere ; and a curious salt tang in the air.

The mountains that had been silent for so long—strong and proud by day, but transfigured by night with all the mysteries of their awakening—became vocal again. At first a gentle singing passed among them, dying away into silence, then a shrill cry swept along their sides, and ceased in a hush that was as if they were now about to be dissolved in a tumult of song. Having risen to that maddening point of ecstasy, the tension was relaxed again till a new shrill cry began to gather along their sides.

Among the folds of Cruach Mór the travelling gusts eddied and wandered, furling round and about till they were lost ; but along the bare face of his brother-hills they went singing on their way, company after company, till they swept up the steep face of Scráig Mór.

Before these had come, the sea had rolled onward toward the shore in smooth and swinging courses, premonitory of some storm wandering over the desert of waters ; but under the gathering light of the moon, white crests began to glow ; and for the first time for many days the noise of waves displaced the gentle washing on the strand, and the jagged rocks along the headlands and cliffs began to toss up spray that glittered coldly in the light that flashed from the moon as the clouds sped across its face.

The sleeping of the waters had an end, and all around

the coast there was the stir and awakening tumult of life. A voice spoke in the quality of that stir that there was to be neither rest nor peace for many days.

Everywhere there was the sense of gathering impetus; but the change came slowly; as if with plenty of time before it in which to effect its will. Sportively and lightly it quickened through the hours, resting at times in a peace that was almost like a continuation, a broken island, of the time that was past except that it was curiously premonitory of the stronger gust that came tugging and tearing across water and land. There was thus the sense of warning abroad. The spells of calm, the strange sudden spells of calm that hung balanced over the night, were as proper a part of the change as the whirls of wind that came out of the great space of the sea and swept singing across the land. They were as dominated by the spirit of unrest as any sudden squall of a week before had been quickly mastered and subdued by the different spirit that prevailed.

There had been the wonder of a sleeper before in any stir that came; there was the tense preparation for new strength now in the lulls of change. For the sleeper had arisen now, and was throwing off sleep leisuredly, with the calm knowledge of a long day before her.

Slowly through the night the change took its course. Earth's little brood of men bridged the passage from one season to another with sleep, while she herself turned from sleep to a laughter like the endless war of waves and a song like the smiting of wind through the big spaces of the hills, to a putting forth of strength that would make those little sleepers cling to hearth and fireside, well though they knew her who had reared them. The clouds frayed more and more at their edges, and more thickly covered the moon. The light of the moon struggled with more difficulty down through them as they thickened and nestled nearer to the earth, and the alternating brightness and darkness that had sent shadows chasing across the land changed to a silver glow that fell over the earth like soft rain. No longer did the clouds race high over the land. The top of Cruach Mór, nearer to the south-western sea than his comrades, was first covered by them. Then Scráig Mór was capped. And slowly and inevitably, as the dawn approached across the world, they sank upon the earth streaming on the wind.

Then the rain was emptied on to the earth, and the land

drank it thirstily. Yet, parched as the land might be, it could not drink as fast as it received, and the noise of waters sounded over the land again as the rain rushed between the potato ridges, filled the drains around the potato pits, ran down from the mountains and through the brooks of the bogs to swell the rivers that had diminished to thin and sluggish ribbons, and poured through drains and shoughs toward the sea. The earth that had been silent for so long was filled with that music, woven in with the louder singing of the wind smiting on its face. Nowhere did it fail. Immediately the lashing of the rain ceased for a space or an eddy of wind passed travelling away into distance, that woven and clear music lifted its note through a hundred voices. Yet one song was sung by every voice. The rivers were loud and deep, the land-furrows heavy, the brooks clear and sharp, but everywhere there was speed: speed and a gurgling, laughing rush, a thronging tumult of music, like a jostling crowd that streamed noisily by in every place.

In the midst of all that noise of rushing waters there was yet one sound that could be distinguished deep-set in the very body of that clear and tangled music. Though it dominated the rest, it was hard to discover in the heart of the hundred voices. It was everywhere; and yet as the waters rushed singing everywhere it seemed to be nowhere. It was the sound of drinking. The land was drinking: drinking deeply and thirstily. The bogs were drinking. Their brooks, that had become parched and cracked, were drinking. The river-banks and beds over which the rushing waters now swelled could be heard drinking noisily. The hills were drinking in every place, drinking even as the water ran down their beards and sides to their feet, greedy of the water that rushed past them to the valleys beneath. Everywhere the land was drinking; and through all the noise of rushing water that one sound came insistently, giving the whole of the music a quality it had at no other time.

So the dawn came creeping up into the air. The previous dawn had come in gold; this dawn came in silver; and that was the difference of the two seasons denoted. The previous dawn had risen into the sky, throwing a pure warning before it. This soaked into the air, changing the blue-silver of the light of the moon into a grey-silver that fell through the mists on to the earth.

Then the curtains of the clouds slowly parted. They were

thinned and distributed, and were drawn upward like broken curtains, fragment by fragment. The rain for a while ceased to lash on the earth, the clouds swept up the sides of the mountains to muster heavily on their summits. The noise of running water and falling water sang out suddenly in every place.

There were no birds singing. There were no birds to be seen. Their voice could have been heard everywhere in the previous dawn uncertainly learning new songs or searching for old songs the miracle of which had gone from them; but now it was as if they had all been swept away, for nowhere could they so much as be discovered, and only the plaintive cry of the curlew could be heard or the call of the plovers as they swept the face of the land in their companies.

So, in the moment's hush that came, the voice of the waters rang clearly out on the face of the earth, purling or roaring in a swollen chorus. Then the wind shifted into the west, and a mighty squall struck the island, furling round and over Cruach Mór, down on the bogs and through the village beneath, striking upon the headlands, and bending heather and grass flat with the earth. It passed; and another came after it through the space made by the lifted clouds. Another and another succeeded. Then the rain came again, to break the moment's hope after dawn, dropping from a height and driven over the land by a mad fury of wind. As it approached it could be seen coming in long, trailing lines that moved forward like curtains being passed across the earth. When it came the long perpendicular lines vanished, to be succeeded by lines that were almost horizontal as the rain lashed across the earth.

Thunder sounded across the heaven, and the rain changed to hail dancing over the land. The waves rose wildly against the land, and the wind whistled unceasingly over heather, grass and land, through huddled cottages and turf *glaims*, with the madness of a tempest. The day before, each cottage had emptied its dwellers over the land; now none left the hearth. Earth had arisen. She had given her ease to all. Her riot she kept for herself. None disputed it with her.

CHAPTER II.

WINTER had come. All the previous day Eoghan had been abroad upon the hills, partly with a desire to mind his sheep, partly (and more profoundly) driven by the torture of anguish that came to him after a troubled hour's sleep at dawn by a memory of the previous night. He had spent the night pacing the heaths and hills under the moon; and when he had reached home he had thrown himself on his bed and slept a sleep that was only a varied form of his troubled wandering. As if his body protested against such a mockery of sleep, he had arisen and gone to fresh wanderings over the hills. The following day also had found him the same way, with a closer inweaving of ordinary purposes.

So his visitors had failed to find him. The sergeant of police had officially noted his absence on such a day as a deeply significant matter. True, the man was usually abroad at his work. True, most men were abroad at their work when the weather permitted it. But to be out of the way on such a day of days was another thing. And when the district inspector, being a simple kind of a man, suggested that the significance of the day might quite conceivably not be known to Eoghan O'Clery, that seemed to the sergeant a poor sort of an argument, and doubly wretched because it had a kind of conclusiveness about it.

Seumas the smith, however, was troubled. He returned at night; and, having failed again, went home disconsolate and short-tempered.

Now as Eoghan stood at the sheltered gable-end of his house watching the fields over which the rain and hail was being driven by the shrieking tempest, and listening intently to the varied orchestration of sound, to his considerable surprise he saw Seumas making his way up beside the river. The first thought was to disappear behind the house, and, under its cover, to make his way across the bog toward the hills. He stopped, contemplating the wildness of the day; and then the thought came that it must be an urgent business that brought the smith out to him through such weather. So he waited, and regarded Seumas' progress with a sort of alertness in his mind that had been created by watching the streaming rain sweep across the land. There was a

quiet shrewdness and intentness in the way he watched the approaching figure dip and rise, leap and move along the irregular ground.

Seumas came over and leant against the gable-end beside Eoghan without a word. Neither of them had looked at the other; and they stood looking over the streaming fields for a long time without a word spoken.

Contrary to his wont, it was Eoghan who spoke first.

"'Tis the change that's in it surely," he said.

"'Tis now," said Seumas.

"'Twas its time anyways."

"'Twas now; and the full of its time."

"'Twas."

So, with silences emphasised by the well-deliberated interruptions of it, the conversation took its unhasting way onward.

"It'll be a bad winter, I doubt," said Eoghan.

"It would be surely. We'd have to pay the good with the bad, right enough. It'll be coarse from this out."

"There wasn't any person's goods hurted in the village?"

"Damn the one of me knows."

"Tomas'll not be finishing Seumas Clancy's house now," said Eoghan, reaching out a little for news and friendship that his mind's unrest made him desire.

"He'll hardly."

"He didn't have it finished yet?"

"Maybe he didn't," said the smith with a sudden accession of dignity. "I wasn't meeting with him these days."

Eoghan scented an awkward theme.

"Is that so?" he said shortly.

"Double distance is single happiness," said Seumas with curt dignity. That gave a period to the conversation, and they stood for a long while in silence regarding the rain that every now and then changed to showers of hail that scattered over the land. Then Eoghan asked Seumas if he would come within the house.

"Let you come in now and take a heat of the fire," he said. "You'll be wet now." As he spoke he turned and looked at the coat that hung wet and heavy against the smith's arm.

But Seumas found a curious mental steadiness in looking intently over the bogs and fields, lashed by the driving rain, towards the mountains, where the streamers of rain passed

like a moving curtain, and where their lower slopes could only dimly be discovered.

"I will not," he said.

"Do now," Eoghan said with unusual warmth, a mood of gentleness passing over him at the rigid intentness of his companion.

"I'm rightly the way I am: I amn't over-wetted," Seumas answered, though his coat was soaked upon him.

"You're welcome anyways," said Eoghan resignedly.

"I know that, lad," Seumas said; and then, after a long silence, the tension of which between them was like the suspense of the one mood, he said in exactly the same tone:

"You weren't back the road so?"

"I was not then," Eoghan said.

"You wouldn't be hearing of the Master likely?"

Eoghan tightened sharply. An excitement suddenly quickened in his blood that very nearly over-mastered his nerves. It was as much as he could do not to shout aloud. A white-hot liquid seemed to have been poured into his veins. But with a powerful effort he held himself in control, and said hardly:

"I wasn't hearing anything."

He was looking hard over the fields; but he saw nothing—a mist was before his eyes. Seumas also was looking hard over the fields; and closely and keenly observing the streaming rain and the vague outline of the hills through it. That was the difference between them. His intentness gave the smith the steadiness he wanted; and in the succeeding silence he held the matter poised thus till it became due for him to speak again; while Eoghan felt as if his brain would be consumed with the fire raging within. Nevertheless, as they stood there, their outward semblance, even the pose of their bodies leaning against the wall, was identical in every point.

"You wouldn't hear of the wake there was in it last night neither and all?"

Eoghan on the instant half turned his head towards Seumas, but stopped himself and looked straight ahead again. He did it without knowing what he did. He had lost consciousness of everything except a sort of blind control of himself. A consuming desire was on him to leap at Seumas and batter at him and force out at once all that there was to say.

"What was that wake?" he asked hoarsely. His ques-

tion was no beating of the wind. In spite of the fire that raged in his brain he had no notion of what was impending, he had put no connection between the smith's questions; he was simply apprehensive of some blow coming.

"It was the Master himself," said Seumas.

Eoghan shrank slowly up. Then, just as if he had been ejected from a catapult, he sprang forward across the field and ran in a perfectly straight line till he was stopped by the river that was now a swollen torrent. He could have crossed without much difficulty, yet he ran up and down the bank like a frenzied thing that had come to an insurmountable barrier. Then he turned, as if stricken by a sudden thought, and ran back as swiftly towards Seumas.

The smith had been looking towards the hills: the thing delivered he had wished to say, he had continued gazing as before, delicately unaware of the havoc he heard and felt beside him. Even when Eoghan fled away he did not shift his gaze; mastering the instinctive urge forward of his body when he saw Eoghan run up and down beside the river like a caged bird, and controlling himself to his averted and unheeding calm. But now as Eoghan came running back towards him, he stole a glance at him. He shifted his gaze quickly; and all the more quickly because of the haggard face he saw; the face of a man in a shock of mental agony, all the more terrible because of the bruises with which it was covered, that Seumas now observed for the first time.

The bruises were upon the cheek bones and about the eyes, and shone brightly now against the pallor of the face. The red beard, too, shone with curious vividness. But it was the glance of the eyes that caused Seumas to turn his head away so promptly. They were the eyes of a man distraught with an agony that had come on him so suddenly that it bewildered as it tortured him; and Seumas knew in an instant that Eoghan, as he ran swiftly toward him with bent figure, had some question burning to be asked.

So he waited with averted glance while Eoghan stood trembling before him. Then when the question still did not come, he turned and looked at Eoghan—who was staring past him with a hopeless expression on his face. He had forgotten what he had wished to ask.

As Seumas was about to turn away again he caught sight of two figures through the rain moving up and down beside the river. One wore cap and cape.

"Esht lad," he said quickly. "Let you rally around. Do now. It's the sergeant and the district inspector that's coming. Likely they're wishful to be searching you with an odd question or so. Let you rally around. Do, lad."

Eoghan made no move. There was a pucker about his brows as though certain things, emerging from the chaos of his emotions, were puzzling him. Could he have found something to do he would have produced that chaos with action. It was this endurance of it that tortured him the more by setting his brain in a whirl; and he stood there before the smith, hardly hearing him, like a man waiting for relief.

"They'd be very apt to show how they do be earning their payment, and that's how it is now," said Seumas again; "and moreover this is a queer affair right enough, as there never was before. They'll be sorting it. Let you be their equal. Do now, lad."

Eoghan made no resistance as Seumas took him by the arm and set him again with his back to the house. So they stood again, looking over the fields and bog and across the driving rain.

Then Seumas heard Eoghan speaking to himself, and he turned his attention to him.

"Poor lad; the poor lad," he heard Eoghan saying. Seumas did not turn toward Eoghan, but nudged him as he said:

"Let you not be grieving now. Things will be queer an odd time, and then they'll be quiet after. 'Tis the way it does ever be, queer and quiet, queer and quiet. One time queer, and another time quiet. But the lads that's coming now'll want coping."

Eoghan gave no heed to him, however, and Seumas heard him murmuring to himself.

"There's a weighty guilt attached to me any more. The poor lad! The poor lad!"

Seumas turned sharply toward him, and turned as quickly away again, for great tears were brimming out of his eyes and running slowly down his cheeks and beard.

CHAPTER III.

It was so the district inspector found them; two figures gazing over the land and giving no heed to him as he approached with the sergeant beside him. He was a thin, spare man, with a long grave face, and he watched Eoghan closely, and yet, as it were, with practised inadvertence, as he approached. Nevertheless, it was no merely professional attention that he gave him. There was something of human interest in his look.

"I would like just a few words with you, Mr. O'Clery," he said.

Eoghan turned about and led the way into the house.

"'Tis a poor sort of a house, but you'll be heartily welcome to it," he said with a quiet dignity that was all the more marked because of his distant manner. Indeed, he had not so much as looked at his visitors. Nor did he trouble to disguise the tears upon his face.

Seumas was looking at him closely. Then he came to a decision, and followed after the three of them.

"We'll not be wanting yourself, if you please, Seumas Clancy," the sergeant said as he saw him enter. "This is a private business we're following."

Seumas stood obstinately in the house with the air of a man who had come to a decision from which it would be hard to shake him.

"There's no reason why he should not be here if it's not objectionable to Mr. O'Clery, sergeant," the inspector said.

The sergeant looked from him to Seumas. It was because he had felt a certain kinship of emotion between Eoghan and Seumas as they had stood awaiting him that the district inspector now spoke; but the sergeant made a mental note of the simple ease with which another witness had been secured. The district inspector therewith advanced in his opinion.

Eoghan drew up the chair for the inspector.

"There's but the one chair with me, Dominic," he said to the sergeant. "It's a poor house itself." Eoghan's dignity was simple, almost tragical; and the district inspector was watching him closely, for he was quivering in every limb as though a fire consumed him within.

"Don't mind now, Eoghan; don't mind now," the sergeant said. "I'll be sitting in any place."

He sat at the end of the bench beside the bed, away from the fire. Eoghan sat on the bench beside the fire; and held his head down between his hands with a sudden tenseness. Seumas stood looking at him fixedly; then came forward and sat beside him, between him and the sergeant. He stared with the same fixity across at the opposite window; but there was such an air of challenging protection about the whole action that a little wisp of a smile went travelling across the district inspector's lips as he turned to Eoghan again.

"It's my formal duty to tell you," he said, "that you need not answer any questions that you think may afterwards tell against you. You have that right, don't you see. Still, that precaution is hardly necessary, as my visit is rather in the nature of a general inquiry."

He waited a minute, looking down at Eoghan, who sat before him with his head between his hands. He took particular note of the white knuckles that quivered beneath his eyes in evidence of a strain he could not otherwise perceive.

"When did you last see James Burke, the late Master at Coisabhaun?" the district inspector asked with a rather dry punctiliousness.

Eoghan's hands dropped from his head, and his face looked up for a moment at his interlocutor with a haggard expression.

"Wasn't it the night himself and me were fighting?—may God rest him, the poor fellow!" Eoghan spoke as though he could scarce stand the strain of so foolish a question. His eyes were red, but the tears were gone, as though the heat that consumed him had burned them away.

"You would see him that night truly," said the inspector drily; and as he looked at Eoghan he checked himself from any development of wit. "But what was that night?"

Eoghan looked at him puzzledly, like one who had lost all reckoning of time.

"Sorra one of me can tell," he said pathetically.

"Surely, Mr. O'Clery," the district inspector continued in calm expostulation, "you know yourself when it would be that you met this man last, and you fighting with him too as a help to your memory."

Eoghan frowned at him, and then sank his head into his

hands. They all waited for him to speak; and when he still made no move Seumas looked round at him in surprise, and then turned to the district inspector.

"I'm after telling him of the Master's going west so roughly, Mr. Lynch," he said, "and he's astray with it at the present time. Do you see now? Yourself and Sergeant Gibbons here came on the hap of an awkward sort of a minute, so you did. And that's how it is now. . . . Eoghan, lad," he continued, turning to Eoghan and putting his hand on his shoulder, "what time was it yourself and the Master fell out and took to blows?"

Seumas was aware that the district inspector was, with dropped eyelids, watching him closely; but he gave no heed to him, and concerned himself with Eoghan. For he did not know how significant a remark he had let fall; and therefore was not to know that the inspector was scrutinising him to discover whether it was or was not designed.

Eoghan raised his head, and turned to Seumas.

"What day was it?"

"Just so. What day was it?"

"What's the day that's in it now?"

"Thursday it is. The change came with yesterday. Yesterday being a Wednesday, do you see? . . . 'Tis an old saying in this place, Mr. Lynch, that if there's any change to be coming in it, it'll come on a Wednesday surely. 'There's a change in it any Wednesday'; that's it now. . . . And this day that's in it is Thursday, Eoghan lad."

Eoghan looked up at him like a man who with a great difficulty brought his mind from something of far deeper concern to a matter of trivial moment.

"Going to the sheep I was yesterday," he said irritably.

"Likely you were," said Seumas. "It failed me to find you in it, so it did."

"I was going to the sheep the day before again. I was coursing the hills the most part, so I was. I was destroyed and moidered in my mind with the night that was in it. I was coursing the hills the most part of the night with the back-side of the moon, for that was the night I fell to blows with the Master. . . . I was coming from Port, do you see?" he went on volubly, having come to a subject that now interested him, and a flush came upon his cheeks as he turned to the district inspector. "There was to be flour waiting for me there—three bags of flour—it didn't come

yet. I was waiting on the hooker for it, and it was middling late before I came striking on the road for home. I was annoyed with having the flour missed, so I was, for it was promised on me——”

“That’s right now,” Seumas interrupted. “Seumas Clancy was telling me last night it’s waiting on you now, and he after bringing himself from Port.”

“When I came to Islean then,” Eoghan continued, not heeding the interruption, “who should I see but some lads laughing at the Master? Drunk he was; and damnably drunk he was, sin^oing and roaring out and rolling beside all parts of the road. The lads were laughing at him. They were laughing, for who should be coming behind on the road but the priest himself? I went quickly to the Master then and gave him a belt of my hand. ’Twas the only way, man. When he saw me coming on the road behind him he started to swear then. He put great abuse on me; and what could I do but to belt him and put him sleeping? To save him from the Manager, do you see? And when the priest was past, I couldn’t rouse him then. . . . I couldn’t stir nor waken him. There was a weighty load of porter in his belly, and he wasn’t capable. He wasn’t, well. So I rised him to my back and put him to his house. It was his luck, so it was. He’d have been put from the school, if he’d been found, like any dirty garment. But it was at his own place, as I’m working it out now in my own head, that I went astray. I’d a right not to tarry, there being trouble between us . . . or as you may say, not between us, for there was no harm attached to the lad, and he wasn’t in a preventable case neither, but between herself and myself over a thing gone-by . . . but that’s not gone-by neither and all.”

Eoghan had spoken swiftly, without any of his characteristic reserve, for the matter that rushed out of him had been stored in his mind these days past, but he stopped abruptly, added his last words slowly and against his will, and stuck fast in a stubborn silence.

The district inspector had watched him closely while he had been speaking; and now that it was apparent that Eoghan would say no more, he questioned him further.

“What you say tallies with what I have already discovered,” he said. “And you didn’t see Mr. James Burke since?”

Eoghan made no reply, but turned his face away toward the bed; and the district inspector saw the firelight glistening in the tears that welled up in his eyes.

The inspector repeated his question.

"Didn't you hear him say he was with the sheep yesterday, and the day before it again?" Seumas demanded angrily. "Would you be having the one man in the two places? There's some people that's never contented, so there are, in soul; and they're the very sort that's earning their money easy with every condition of questions."

"Be treating Mr. Lynch respectfully now, Seumas Clancy," said the sergeant, taking hold of his arm, "or you'll go out of this house, though you're my friend; so you will, troth."

"It'll take a lengthy mile of men like yourself to stir me from this, Dominick Gibbons," said Seumas, shaking his arm free; "and there's none better acquainted with that than yourself. If yonder man has a right for me to be treating him rightly, then let him not moidher this beautiful lad with his questionings that are astray through the whole matter. It's not himself has the deed done, if that's what you're thinking. The likely cause is the Master himself, God rest him now, with the drink and the trouble, tramping by the side of the loch, and putting a hand to himself, and giving a lep to be out of it when he had himself wetted with the cold water; and that's what all the villagers are saving presently; and they'd have a bad construction to put against this lad, so they would, if they'd only the tail end of a likely shirt showing from the trousers of the case. 'Tis a forcible opinion that they have; and a forcible opinion's the hell of a trusty opinion, Mr. Lynch, as you'd be very apt to remark in the course of your business. So let you go easy now. If his recitation tallies, as you're after saying now, with what yourself has found, then you'd a right to be a contented man and give the glory to God and go from it. See that now. Isn't it easy to remark that the decent lad's away with the moidher of it? Sit down, *a mhic o!*"

The district inspector had at first motioned to the sergeant not to interfere with Seumas; but soon his attention had been arrested by Eoghan. Soon after the smith had spoken, Eoghan had suddenly turned about again with a new interest in the proceedings. He had swung round and watched Seumas. Then he turned toward the district in-

spector and looked at him with a close interest, with a collected and speculative manner that he had not yet displayed. He turned from one to the other of them as though weighing the subject of their dispute. There was an alertness about him as if at last some action had been demanded of him; and, at first, a puzzledness, that was not perplexity, marked him, as if he were not quite sure what that action was. Then, as Seumas drew to an end, he rose up slowly; nor would he sit again though Seumas tugged at him to compel him to do so.

They all waited on him; but it was some time before he spoke; and when at last he did so he spoke with a careful and deliberate dignity.

"Is it what you're thinking, Mr. Lynch," he said, "that it's all on the head of me, this is?"

"I'm thinking nothing, Mr. O'Clery," the district inspector answered. "I have to sort this matter out like any other matter; and in my own behalf I have the simple opinion, that is . . . that a man in my position will do well to make no judgments till he has the whole matter sorted. In this affair I haven't that part of the business completed yet."

"It'd be a damnable good thing if every person of your sort of profession held those same good opinions," said Seumas pugnaciously.

"That may be, Mr. Clancy," the district inspector said drily. "There's something to be said for what you say; but I am presently talking to your friend."

Eoghan stood before him with a perfectly calm and decided manner.

"I am very wishful, Mr. Lynch," he said, "for to know what is in your mind. You wouldn't be striking the *boithirin* up to this place with the day that's in it hadn't you some likely causes in your mind. You'd a right to be advising me maybe; but, anyways, if it's what you're thinking, or what any other one might be thinking that has a part in it, that it's all on the head of me this matter is, I've a direct purpose to be searching out what is in your mind."

The district inspector looked up in admiration at Eoghan, whose dignity gave him a curious addition of height, and whose very labour of utterance increased the sense of dignity. He perceived that Eoghan was, not merely resolved to be importunate, but urged to importunity by a pain of mind it

would be dangerous to gainsay. The figure before him seemed at a glance to be standing with careless ease; yet really, as he perceived, it was tense and strained. He spoke very slowly and deliberately in reply.

"I think," said he, "you need not be troubling yourself, Mr. O'Clery. Of course, it was natural that you . . . well now, that you should be questioned . . . in view, anyway, of the bruises you both have now . . . and well, of the rumours that travel about that I was bound to be hearing, do you see? The direction of evidence . . . you see, I have talked the matter carefully over with many more than yourself . . . leads me to the opinion that the late Master's death was not designed—I think, not altogether designed by himself . . . perhaps he was playing with the idea of suicide in drunkenness and desperation, and was taken further than he meant." He stopped, feeling he was going too far; then continued drily: "In truth, that is how Mr. Clancy here put it a minute or so past. Most people seem to be travelling to that opinion. I think you've no need to be making yourself uneasy."

Eoghan's effort to be patient was obvious all the time that the district inspector was speaking; and now there was a sharp touch of irritation in his voice.

"Is it what you're saying that the charge is at me, or isn't it at me?"

The district inspector replied curtly and briskly.

"There's no charge preferred at all; and I'm of the opinion at the minute that there won't be either. That's my present opinion."

Eoghan had been looking intently down at him. Now he drew himself up and looked straight ahead at the wall over the inspector's head. He had the air of a man taking a calm decision; but there was something utterly weary in the gesture with which he straightened himself.

"Well now," he said, "it's on the head of me surely, may God help me! There's none that's concerned in that poor fellow's dying but myself only. Sorra word of a lie there is in that, but I abused him sorely, so I did, and he that never put any hurt at me, but went to his own purposes as he had a right to be doing. May God help me now, that's older than the hills!"

There was a break in his voice, as he concluded, that he made an effort to quell; and he stood there set and straight.

For it was some time before they took in the significance of his words. Then Sergeant Gibbons looked questioningly across at his inspector. The district inspector did not move, but watched Eoghan closely. And Seumas, when the force of the words reached him, sprang up and tried to pull Eoghan down to his seat.

"What's the trouble with you, lad? You're astray in your mind," said he angrily. "Come out of that! Come out of that! Let you sit down and heed your tongue, and not be letting great wind from your mouth like any ruined *amadan*. What's away with you?"

He tugged at Eoghan's shoulder, but Eoghan put him away with his hand, and kept his gaze steadily fixed at the opposite wall.

"There's nothing away with me, well," he said. "But I'm seeing the one thing only that's in it." He turned toward the district inspector. "You'd a right to take me now, so you had," he said, "for there'll surely be some judgment following after me." He spoke like a man who had taken a sharp decision and could not bear any thought of delay in its execution.

"Do you mean now," said the district inspector, "that you were the cause of Master Burke's death? That's a very strange thing to say."

Eoghan said nothing, but simply stood before him. The district inspector seemed puzzled.

"Will you explain yourself, Mr. O'Clery?" he said.

"I'm meaning but what I'm saying," Eoghan said irritably. "His dying the way he did is on the head of me."

The district inspector's face lightened.

"In a roundabout pursuant kind of a way maybe; but directly? Was it directly?" he asked.

"What's that now?"

"I mean, were you actively and directly the cause of death?"

Eoghan looked away from him again to survey the whole action clearly and without interruption of human faces.

"It was the one thing in it," he said very slowly, "that was out of the course . . . of what would have been. It was the one thing surely that was out of Nature, as you might say . . . just as I might be . . ." he searched for his word . . . "directly . . . pushing to him furninst the loch. Didn't it come out the very way I designed it?"

“ Hadn't you best be sitting down and explaining yourself, Mr. O'Clery? ” said the district inspector quietly.

Eoghan looked down at him, and, seeing himself called out of the close ring of the things he saw, and the action so clearly thereby demanded of him, seemed about to break into a rage. His face flushed, and he stared angrily at his questioner. His whole body trembled. But the grave, matter-of-fact calm of the man opposite seemed to steady him; and his fists clenched with his effort to control himself as he began to speak in a dry, hard, passionless tone. He went straight into the midst of things; and his words came as though a misfitting cog-wheel worked with strain and difficulty, with a heavy labour that slipped every now and then into a rapid rush.

“ It wasn't with him at all. He did only follow out his ends, well, as any person had his occasions to be doing, and sorra one more than another. I haven't anything agin him; nor hadn't I anything agin him that time, but just to be putting him from my ways. We were both equal in it, if I was in it before him itself—which he mightn't be knowing, troth, there were such snares put through it. It was herself that played the devil's trick. Maybe she'd have her snares too. There's never any person that's rightly sorting the ways of the world, and a person would be hard set knowing the things that do be in it. But I was angered, do you see? I had my occasions, well. Hadn't I sold my sheep for to be building? Hadn't I my sod cut for the place of the house? Hadn't I the sweet words of her with me so? And didn't she go matching herself the very same night that was in it? She did, then; and a roaring anger came to me. It burned me, man; it burned through me, so it did, like a sooted chimney roaring out till you wouldn't put your hand to the wall for the blisters it'd be gathering. I was away with it, so I was. And then it fell out that I was putting a curse on her in the marrying she proposed. I did, then. I had it learnt one time from a wanderer, and I striking on the roads through Kerry, who had queer parts of knowledge, and told me it was for drowning. He did, well. He told it was for drowning. He gave it to me because, says he, you have the acquaintance with yourself, and 't isn't right for it to be perished and lost; and I wasn't to use it ill, says he, or it'll bring you sorrow. And I used it ill, God help me. I had it in my mind . . . before my

two eyes, I had it, and I away with the *rann* . . . that he'd be drowning in the loch beyond; and 'tis come to pass on the head of me."

The district inspector had been listening very gravely. Indeed, it was impossible to have done otherwise, so earnest and impassioned had Eoghan been. It was clear that in a sudden concentration he had seen one thing very clearly, and that he held that one thing before his eyes beyond the confusions of all else. So when, after an awkward and constrained silence, the inspector replied to him he did so with a low, grave voice, without a trace in his tone of the sarcasm in his words.

"I am afraid," he said, "that what you are now after saying wouldn't be considered satisfactory from the law's looking at things. You can't be expecting to get yourself convicted on a charge of that kind surely."

Eoghan sat down hastily on the bench again, almost, indeed, as if he had fallen. He looked at the inspector puzzledly; and spoke at once, very rapidly.

"You're misdoubting, maybe, a curse could do a thing the like of that. Well, it could now, though the many that's cursing are talkers only."

"I'm doubting nothing, Mr. O'Clery. I'm not a young man, don't you see, and in my experience I've seen some very odd things. I could, perhaps, astonish you too. But you see now, you must take the law as you find it." He glanced rapidly at the sergeant, and a whimsical smile flickered across his lips. "Perhaps those sort of things have to work themselves out. Perhaps they have. Perhaps they come back again to the hand that threw them. They are strange things in the world without a doubt. But you will find that out for yourself. My business is to look for a blow, or a kick, or poison, or a gunshot, or something of that kind, do you see? Wouldn't we make our two selves laughable only, going into a court with your story? You don't see that now because you're excited; but you'll see it yet."

Eoghan had buried his head in his hands again while the district inspector spoke; and when he had concluded he answered in a muffled voice.

"You'd be knowing yourself. You'd a right to be knowing yourself; and I amn't fit to be considering, though I was afeared you'd say the same thing as you're after saying."

He had, with the single eye of the passionate, gone by the immediate and direct road to his end; but now that it was denied to him he sat with his head between his hands, thinking and thinking, till his thought was like a fever in his brain.

Then he felt a hand gripping his shoulder. He started up, and saw Seumas, whose presence he had forgotten. A coldness towards him came over him, the coldness of a man who felt his privacy was assaulted.

Seumas also had been thinking; thinking, not in ideas, but in a series of visions.

"Let you not be grieving, *a mhic o*," he said. "It wasn't preventable. Wasn't it one thing coming after another? Wasn't it now? Well, it was then. It was in no way preventable. It was set in the will of God for him."

Eoghan said nothing; but looked round at him in cold hostility. Seumas felt that, but continued sturdily.

"If it was your word following after the Master, God rest him, maybe in all there was something following after yourself: there's never any saying how it might have been." Eoghan started, stood to his feet, and watched Seumas closely. "Well now, it might be, troth. And would you be complaining? Sorra use there'd be in that, *a mhic*. 'Tis set and ordered; 'tis one thing following after another; and we must even be taking the weight of it, so we must. We must be going forward and striking sounds out on the road till it's our own time. God give us help indeed to be doing that. Look now. The Master hit you, and you hit him another, so you did. Or it might be, in soul, it was the other way over. That's all right enough; that's all right enough surely. But if the Master came through that door now, would he be complaining at you for the word that followed him, or be wanting to give you back another? He would not then. What way is that, is it? For why, is it? Because it might be yourself that had a word following after you, and it might be yourself that'll have the word yourself spoke following after you yet; and damn it, he'd be knowing himself now how it is. You might, in soul. I declare to my Almighty God, that's how it is now."

Eoghan had crossed the room, and sat in the chair the district inspector had left, intently watching Seumas with burning eyes. When the smith had finished he paced up and down the house, with rapid steps. Then he suddenly

strode out. When Seumas went out he saw him through the driving rain standing by the sheltered side of his *glaim* of turf, away from the house, plainly wishing to be alone. So he went his own way back to the village.

CHAPTER IV.

THAT night at the wake-house Nancy Burke looked up suddenly, and was startled to see the figure of Eoghan outlined in the doorway. He stood so for an instant, with his broad-brimmed hat held to his breast, looking across at the dead body, before he sank to his knees and said his prayer for the dead.

The house was full at the time, albeit it was early in the night. The bed had been moved away, and a bier arranged in the middle of the wall; and there, before the draped sheet, with pictures of Christ and the Virgin stuck upon it, lay the body of James Burke. On the table before the bier were the three candles in tall holders, a plate of filled pipes and cut tobacco, a long twist of tobacco and a pile of pipes. On the bench before the bier among the women about the fire sat Nancy, and opposite her on the chairs about the door of the further room were Maurya and Mary Quilter with the elder women. Planks raised on stones across the end of the house served for benches, and these were thronged with men. Beside the table in front of the bier stood Tadhg Quilter, cutting tobacco and filling pipes to hand round among the newcomers.

So that the two who first saw Eoghan in the doorway, before he came to pray within the house, were Nancy and Tadhg Quilter. They were both startled; and as perplexed as they were startled, though in ways different enough. She had certainly not expected him; and her glance at his face set her wondering what it was had brought him, and what it was made him look so strangely at the dead. Whereas Tadhg Quilter's first thought was to put him from the house. Two subsequent thoughts, however, mastered that first-comer. The first of these, and the least, was that Eoghan was a hardy man, and a determined man. The other, that mobilised its forces in every part of his brain, was that Tadhg Quilter was a shopkeeper, from

whom a noble magnanimity would be a right and proper usage of the occasion. He resolved to wait his moment for an adequate display of that magnanimity.

When Eoghan rose from his knees she saw him go to the far corner of the room and sit on a spare stone that had not been used for the benches and left against the wall. There she could see him—dimly, for the light was ill there, and tobacco smoke drifted from many pipes—intently staring at the dead body. She had pretended not to see him, but, pulling her shawl closer about her face, she watched him closely nevertheless. The peculiar expression of his face troubled her. As time passed, moreover, it hurt her that he never once looked toward her, or sought to find her out, but kept his gaze always fixed upon the dead. Once that would have made her cold and hard with pride; but now it grieved her as much as it angered her.

It disturbed her too. There was something almost uncanny about it. She turned about to see if there was anything amiss with the body. But James Burke lay in his last sleep, with the light of the candles shining on him, his black heavy hair and moustache showing almost blue against the waxy pallor of his face, swollen with the traces of his death. Nancy was troubled at Eoghan's fixed stare towards the bier.

It was broken, however, by Tadhg Quilter. After some time, in a lull in the conversation (for which he had been waiting) he came forward with a handful of pipes.

"Let you be smoking! Let you be smoking now," he called out loudly, handing the pipes around to the elder men. He left himself with one, and then looked carefully around. Having brought attention to himself he directed it toward Eoghan. Then he went briskly over to him, and handed him the remaining pipe. "Let you be smoking! There's a welcome for every man in this house. There's no differences. That's the very way the Master'd be having it, I'm sure. Death is a great extinguisher."

Eoghan, however, hardly seemed to hear him. He took the proffered pipe and bunch of matches; he struck a match against the pipe, and drew hard on the pipe till the match nearly burned his fingers; then he smoked in his corner, giving heed to none. The only difference it made in him was that he was distracted from whatever thoughts had caused him to gaze so fixedly at the dead body. He

sat now with his elbows on his knees, looking on the ground, his broad-brimmed hat hiding his face from most of the company.

Men rose up and went out, while others came streaming in; but he never moved. In the later stages of the night the throng became great. The low buzz of conversation turned to a debate at large, aided by mysterious supplies of porter, the source of which it was difficult to trace. This changed to the telling of *seanchas* by a cluster of old men. Tale succeeded tale, many of them long and elaborated, ranging from ancient glory to modern wonder. Nearly all of them were in Irish; for the few that were in English soon ran aground through a failure of wit and resource in that language and its feebler capabilities for the richness and splendour indispensable for a good *seanchas*. Thus it came about that the tales in English were brief and topical anecdotes, whereas those in Irish were linked with a rich past, told with dramatic illustration; and to these latter the whole company leaned forward and listened with kindling eyes. All, save a few of the younger men; and Eoghan, who sat gazing on the ground, changing his attitude only now and again to strike a match against his pipe.

Towards the early hours of the morning the old men thinned away, and the young men began singing. Then the old women began to sing too: old traditional songs that droned on and on with age-old haunting in them. For the first time Eoghan stirred. The song was one of an old crossed love, charged with a mystery and fate that weighted the very quavering of the chant with which it was given. Voice, tone and words accorded; the quarter-tones and eighth-tones up and down which old Maurya O'Dochertaigh's voice quavered and hovered with the words she sang silenced the house, and searched their way to the midst of Eoghan's brooding thoughts. His pipe dropped out of his hand. The noise of its breaking on the floor made him start up in his seat. He stared across at Maurya O'Dochertaigh where she sat with her shawl over her head chanting her song above the fire. Then his glance travelled searchingly round till it found Nancy; and to Nancy that look was infinitely worse than his previous neglect of her. She knew nothing of his mental unrest; but the eyes that looked across the room at her with reproach and passion in them, and agony therewithal; with

love so passionate that it burned away the formal distinction between it and hate, proving the two to be one, obverse and reverse as it were; and something very like fear of her—all this burned in those eyes, and hurt her like a blow in her brain, though she knew nothing of what it all meant. She had the feeling, while he looked at her, that she was in his embrace; that he was crushing her till she could have screamed, that he was crushing her till she gasped, crushing her simply because he found he could not throw her from him. Yet she felt an infinite tenderness for him; an emotion so strange to her that she felt a delight in her pain, like a mother with her first babe at her breast.

The song ceased; and Tadhg Quilter came forward to offer Eoghan another pipe. He did so quite simply and unostentatiously this time, and asked Eoghan why he did not sit on one of the benches where there was now space enough. Eoghan took the pipe with a word of thanks; and when Tadhg had moved out of the way he fixed his gaze again on the dead body on the bier, as though that sight were necessary to hold him to some resolve that he had taken.

By daylight the company had thinned away to a few of those most nearly connected with the house; yet Eoghan still sat on his stone at the end of the house, looking on the ground before him. All the others kept glancing at him; and Nancy felt alternately uncomfortable and indignant on his behalf.

Then Sean Burke, who had been sitting near Maurva Flaherty during the night as butler for the refreshments within the further room, came over to Tadhg, and the two of them whispered together. In the broad light of day Sean Burke had been observing Eoghan closely, and had recognised his fellow-traveller on the hooker of years gone by. By a curious freak of memory Eoghan's last words came back to him with the recognition, and the sense of irony had quenched the hot anger he had felt all the night against this origin, whatever district inspectors might say, of his brother's death. A rough compassion came out in him; and as a result of his consultation with Tadhg he went up to Eoghan.

"You'd better come within and take a tent of the stuff," he said. "I have some of the real matter brought from beyond. We haven't the use of dry wakes there,"

"I will not," said Eoghan rising up.

He spoke quietly and decisively, but he did not look to see who it was that spoke to him. He looked across at the bier once again, and then round the house. The women had gone within the further room for a cup of tea, or were waiting about the door of it. Tadhg Quilter was cutting up some more tobacco for the funeral, and Nancy stood beside the hearth looking down at the fire she had just rebuilt. Eoghan's glance rested on her for a moment or so; then he strode across the room to her.

She had been watching Sean Burke speaking to him, alert and ready to interfere if need were; and when Eoghan looked at her and came across the house to her she was startled.

Eoghan came right up and stood beside her, speaking in a low voice.

"When had we best be marrying? We'll not be delaying."

He spoke like a man who wished to get a matter settled that burdened his mind, not at all like a lover. Nancy felt that; and felt that there was something deliberate in the choosing of this moment. He was like a man urging the performance of a duty; like a man with a clear determination that could not wait its prosecution. Yet she felt, too, a delight in the nearness of his presence; and she could see that this had affected him also, despite his control on himself.

"Esht, Eoghan!" she said. "'Tis no time to be talking of that."

"'Tis the aptest time, and the proper place forby," he said.

The hard fierceness with which he spoke startled her, for it gave his words a significance she could not fathom.

"What are you meaning by that—" she said rapidly. She noticed that Tadhg Quilter and the women about the door of the room were watching them suspiciously.

"There's an end to be put to words that were spoken a time gone by," he said, "for the things that are working in it will have to finish now surely. We'll have to be marrying now. You'd a right not to have turned from me evermore, so you had. God help the two of us. 'Tis a bad job now anyways."

"Esht, lad!" she said. "They're watching us. Let

you be going now. . . . There's none blaming yourself," she added in a slightly louder voice, partly for the benefit of those who might hear, and partly for himself because she felt he was in need of such a word.

He looked at her with doubt and pain in his face; then turned and strode out.

What did he mean? she asked herself, kicking a fallen sod back into the fire. His words seemed obvious; and yet he spoke them as though he meant by them something that was very far from obvious. But her perplexity was broken by Tadhg Quilter.

"What was he saying to you now?" he asked, coming angrily across the floor of the house.

"What would he be saying?" she replied. She saw the women surging out from the door of the room, and Sean Burke watching her with a peculiar expression from the centre of the house. But she was perfectly calm. It was not for nothing she had established an ascendancy in that house; and, moreover, as she spoke the thought came to her for the first time that the house now was hers. "Grieving, he was, of the last time he was in it, and the two of them fighting all over the floor of this house. And I was telling him not to be heeding. I was telling him that it was only dirty scuts not reaching to the belt of him, the sort that do be thinking only the way to twist a dirty penny to the shape of a sixpenny piece by some flaming method, that did ever put a word against him. And I'm after telling him forby, Tadhg Quilter, to be spitting out by the side of that sort, so I am. . . . Let you make me room there." And, pushing the women aside, she made her way to the room.

"She has a tongue on her, lad, by gob," said Sean Burke to Tadhg Quilter; and when Tadhg Quilter did not reply, he made his own way to his breakfast.

CHAPTER V.

DURING the burial Nancy Burke had a strong feeling—oppressive almost like a physical presence that Eoghan was above her on the side of Scraig Mór where it rose almost sheer from the edge of the burying ground. She

looked up to see if she could distinguish him; but she could not find him. She had seen him walking in the funeral procession; and walking with someone though they were not talking. Only a few of those who had followed were in the burying ground; most of the men stood smoking in the road, talking together or minding the horses; men and women were praying beside various graves—from whom sobbing and caoining continually came across the ground, mixing with the sound of the gale smiting on the ground or roaring through the air. Eoghan was not among them, she knew. She had had old Michael O'Clery's grave pointed out to her as she came by; and he was not there. Nor was he with the cluster about the open grave before her. She assured herself of these things because the presence of Eoghan up on the mountain side above was almost like an oppression.

All her old fear returned to her, that her effort for mastery in other things of late had driven away. She felt like a person in a dream. She was afraid of that steep height above her that seemed almost to hang over the burying-place like a gaunt god. She was afraid of the sharp cry that rang out from its surface when the wind struck it. She was afraid of Eoghan up there who seemed to belong to these things. And when the service rite was over, and the ancient people's rite began; when the earth was shovelled into the grave, and the old women, led by Maurya, sank on their knees beside the open grave, shoulder to shoulder, and began caoining and caoining and caoining, the refrain of the lament, its sharp poignant rise and its sobbing, shuddering fall weighted with tears, through tones and quarter-tones, like the ancient sorrow at the heart of the world, a fantastic picture came before her mind of Eoghan up there among the bare rocks and crying winds and the caoining circling up toward him; and she was terrified. Her cheeks were deathly pale, and she was trembling. Barely could she maintain a rigid composure.

"Well," said Maurya Flaherty, rising and drying her eyes, "the decent man, it didn't fail someone to cry him. May God rest his soul and give him peace."

"May He be doing that now surely," said one. "It's good to be thinking of him getting his proper rites and all, though there's a doubt itself in the way he came to the end of him."

“ Well, we’d a right to be thinking kindly of that indeed,” said another. “ There’s hardships in this world, there’s no gainsaying, and a person does never be knowing.”

“ It was kindly now with Father Hinnissey to be giving him the goodness of the doubt of that.”

“ It was now. There’s many wouldn’t have done it.”

“ Isn’t it costing me two candlesticks of weighty silver? ” said Nancy sharply. “ Isn’t that a big price to be paying, and Mr. Lynch saying he was sure it was a mistake, a slip maybe and a grabbing out of the hand? ”

“ Well, now, such things have to be maintained, and that’s all about it. It’s a great mercy to God we had him rightly buried, and a good wake.” Thus Maurya Flaherty signified an end to that subject.

Yet Nancy had spoken as much from a desire to recover herself as in criticism of the more or less of the due offering. All the way back upon the car she was short and cantankerous with those who spoke with her, till even Mary Quilter was ruffled, and Maurya lifted her hands and said to the grey heavens :

“ God have mercy on us ! Isn’t himself lying happy and peaceful beyond in his last bed, God rest him? And what’ll I do that’ll be living in it now on my lone, with a scolding tongue speaking out beside me all times? Wouldn’t any person liefer be travelling on the roads with a tacky nail showing through her boots, and giving a wishful prayer for those that are at rest? ”

“ He’ll sleep comfortabler than ever you will, Maurya Flaherty,” said Tadhg Quilter, viciously whipping the horse’s ears, “ and you a stranger, moreover, in your own house, and a bad winter setting in. I guess there’ll be no many visitors to the heat of the fire that’s with yourself.”

Nancy gave no heed to any of them. She was troubled with her own thoughts, for the dread that weighed upon her at the burial remained with her throughout the days. She began to wish she had not gone to the burial. When the gale increased during some nights to a frenzy that threatened to tear the roof from the house, she sat over the fire instead of going to bed, and held herself in a tension that was but the continuation, with slight changes, of the fear she had felt then. The continued thunder and lightning, and the heavy hail that was thrown against the window till it seemed that no window could have withstood

it, made her shrink, less from it than the dread it brought to the surface in her.

Sometimes she went up on the heath wishing for Eoghan to come; rather hopelessly, however, for she felt sure that he would not come near her yet—and not out of any sense of propriety, but simply because of some resolve he had taken that she could not fathom. She wanted him; she almost craved for him; he, and he only, could silence this dread and unrest in her. Moreover, she remembered his words to her that she now had on her the smell of the burning he once had known; and she no longer had the strength to deny or rebut that fact even to herself. She was sick with longing for him; and she bitterly cursed the misguidance of the past years. She did not even know that her weapons had been knocked out of her hands. In stray moments she felt this dimly, realising with sharp resentment that he was now the encased and she the naked; he the strong and she the helpless; but the indignation this awoke in her was only momentary, and soon faded back into the sick craving she had for him.

The man that was gone she did not even miss. She had too completely cut him off from her life to notice his final passage from it. There were, to be sure, no more tense and silent meals—irritable interludes with her mother took their place. There was no more waiting at night for the rapid stumble up the *boithirin*—they went to bed early, glad to escape from the day. No man lay beside her in the bed, stiff and apart, and afraid of her even though heavy with porter—she could wrap herself about with the blankets and lie where she would. Yet all this was as it should be. It was only the breathing of fresh air, the walking at ease in the middle of the road, nothing to be particularly thankful for.

It was all as it should be, her life was as she would have ordained it, but for this sense of waiting for something that was coming, and the craving for him who should bring it, and the curious dread against which she rebelled, that was sometimes like a presentiment.

Partly this was due to the weather that prevailed. If the calm and peaceful beauty of her ease had been prolonged, Earth now made full avenger with her riot. For over two months there was no cessation to it. Twice or thrice after mid-day the wind had swung to the north, and brought a promise of a little ease; but in the early hours of the morn-

ing it had slipped down again, and the next day saw a tempest that roared again over the land and lashed the sea. Such continued thunder and lightning had never been known, as was testified in every conversation. To many of the houses *meitheals* were called to bind the roofs anew. Corn *cruachs* were laid low, however securely anchored; and the few slated houses paid a heavy toll when the wind, ceasing from a steady rage, whirled by in twisting squalls, that could be seen working their damage as they came.

Save for those who took the air and passed the news at the sheltered sides of the cottages all life was stricken within doors. Earth had her spaces to herself. The only signs of life were those who prowled beside the jagged rocks of the shore looking for wreckage timber. Old Maurya Flaherty herself could not keep her bed many a night. Little wonder that Nancy passed her nights and days in a continual state of fear and tension.

CHAPTER VI.

WITH Eoghan an extraordinary period of stagnation occurred. He was an assiduous herd—that is to say, instead of letting his sheep wander as they would, he herded them continuously; and so he was abroad on the hills during all the tempests that prevailed. He had a habit, learned from old Michael, whose habits were considered pedantic, of wrapping a heavy piece of dyed homespun blanketing about his shoulders like a plaid; and thus equipped he went through the hills every week. It was well for him that he was busy, as, in the state that befell him, it found him some occupation to stir the customary uses of his life.

It was as if he had been put aside, he and all his powers and purposes, to be resumed at some other time when he would be required in a coming ripeness of occasion. He had laid in his stock of flour for the winter. Padraic McLir had brought him up several creels of potatoes and turnips (receiving in return the promise of labour in the coming spring), as he had no crop of his own for the year; and a stock of salted herring hung from the rafters beside the wall. So he rose, pursued his day automatically, turning at times with a new studiousness to bury himself in some of the more

modern of his father's books, and returned again to his sheep like a man in a patient suspense—like a man who might be occupying himself with stray tasks while he waited for something that should come to the door of his house; something expected; till the coming of which it was useless to think of being occupied in any enterprise.

Yet life will have its course; it will recognise no suspense of itself, even if the will desire it, or a flowing together of purposes beyond the will seem to achieve that exterior semblance; and beneath the outward appearance the stir of his life continued and flowed onward—just as, under the seeming still waters of a river, its movement onward to its destination, and its development thitherward, and the stir and thrill of its containing life, are continued beyond the sight.

A good deal of this under-current and stir of his life was in view of the thing that was expected. If he sat for hours before the fire while the storms raged without, his inactivity thus was only a seeming. He thrived forward steadily; more steadily than if he had been occupied with fretful tasks that only spun upon themselves and tended nowhere. The isolated position of his cottage enabled him, as it were, to keep shelter while remaining all the time in close touch with Earth without; and never once, during all these days, did he lose that touch. His perfect quietude in waiting, the poise of his life, in act, thought and will, were proof of that. He listened to the buffets of the wind against the house, or its bounding along the land, with a quiet delight, a sense of companionship stiffened with austerity; enjoying deeply the very things that at that very time beset Nancy with a continual fear. These were the things of which he was a part, as surely a part as the hills and the winds. Sometimes, as he sat there hour by hour, it was almost as if he were disembodied, and no more a disjointed and enfreed part of Earth; as if he and the very house in which he sat were one with the rhythm of Earth.

At times an overpowering desire came upon him to go at once to his mother and speak with her again, learn what she was thinking, and what she thought of the present pass to which he was to come; and there is no doubt that he would have done this but for the fact that the island was storm-bound. Then her idea of a fate following him, or a fate awaiting him, would assail him like a sudden blow; he would see himself set in the midst of things he could not

understand, and a fierceness to take up his decision and hasten the time for which he waited came on him till he could scarce withstand it.

Such times came on him in rhythm. In the main he was content to wait; all other things slipped away out of his mind, but a disembodied quiescence, from which he grew to an occupation of thought that was only the future brought into the present.

For he had to be preparing for the future, the more especially as his bit of land had lain fallow for two years, and he had no crops for the next spring. One day as he sat by his fire in that perfect stillness of his, as though he were abroad with the hills and winds and running water, the latchet of the door lifted and a man came within the house, throwing a sack from his shoulder to the floor.

The newcomer stood looking at him for a moment, waiting for him to turn about. Then, seeing his entrance had apparently not been noticed, he marched roughly across the house to the fire.

"I've a hundred and over of praties brought for you," he said. "Likely you'll be lacking them."

Eoghan looked round startled, and saw Michael McLir standing above him. His hostility was disarmed at the sight, for he had not seen Michael for years. As he looked at him his mind searched backward slowly and quite deliberately in the effort to try and place Michael in some part of his life; to put him in some gap he felt in his mind; and he reflected, quite calmly, that he did not remember having spoken to him since the night of the *cleamaraigh* went to Nancy's wedding. He was a little discontented with the placing; but passed the matter by as he said:

"Did you get back yet?"

"I did, then," said Michael, with a rough, grim laugh. "I was walking with you in the Master's funeral."

Instantly, like a button to its slot, the image of Michael flew to the place Eoghan had desired to fill. He was a little bewildered at the rapid adjustment and completion of things; and temporised with a question.

"Was it to England or Scotland you went?"

"'Tis equal which," Michael said contemptuously. "'Twas some bloody place that wasn't this place."

"You're welcome," Eoghan said, putting out his hand to him.

Seeing Michael once again smile a grim smile he wondered for an instant whether he had said that before, and he felt awkward and at a disadvantage. He walked over to the sack of potatoes Michael had brought.

"Have you the mare outside, or was it a cuddy?" he said.

"I was my own cuddy," said Michael, turning his head aside to let the words, as it were, fall out of his mouth. He was standing before the fire, and had his back to Eoghan.

Eoghan surveyed the sack, tied at the mouth with a rope, and thought of the storm and the rough *boithirin* up which Michael had come. Not many men would have taken that ungainly weight a hundred yards of such a road.

"You're not too bad," he said; and swung the sack to his back to empty its contents into some *cliabhs* that stood in the corner. He folded up the sack, tied it round with the rope, and brought it round to Michael.

"Let you be sitting," he said; and he filled a kettle and put it on the hook.

Then, as a thought came to him, he went over and brought back one of the potatoes, and, sitting opposite Michael, he began to cut it open with his knife.

"Are there many of these with yourselves?" he said.

"Not too bad," said Michael, not turning round.

"I'd be well pleased," Eoghan said slowly and thoughtfully, "buying some of this sort to lay out above for early setting. I'm thinking they're a grand sort for early spuds."

Michael looked over his shoulder at the two halves of the potato that Eoghan held in his hands.

"There's no worth in them for this land," he said.

"They are too loose for this place. They'd go away all small or be turning breacet and rotten. Wouldn't you need to be drilling them in some loftier place, in harder lands, well?" He was thinking of Eoghan's few fields in the sedgy land about the house.

"I was thinking that myself now," said Eoghan, contemplating the two halves, and prodding the heart of them with his knife. "It wasn't for this place I was thinking them, but over in Pairc Glas." And he ran his nail down the white centre.

Michael looked round and stared hard at Eoghan. He could not see the face, but the manner and attitude were quite plainly and straightforwardly that of a man occupied

with his thoughts. Of no subtlety or rapidity of thought he stuck fast in the midst of this thing. All along Eoghan had puzzled him, but this last sentence of his was the climax to puzzlement. He did not know (Eoghan himself did not know) that Eoghan felt toward him, now that he had come closer to him, as he might feel toward an element of Earth—toward rough wind, or harsh sea, or blunt, hard rock-face; and, therefore, he could not understand the simple friendliness with which this aloof man, shy and proud with his neighbours, accepted his presence. That was the first thing, with which in a blunt, crude kind of a way he had already been grappling. Then there was the occupation already, before the new year had been rounded, with a thought for the following spring. And finally there was this man, with some of the worst land in Maolan, so calmly talking of planting potatoes on some of the best and most envied.

Michael McLir stared at him with his cold blue eyes wide open and without a flicker in them. Having a great contempt for *finesse* as the proper occupation of fearful men, he was about to ask Eoghan plainly and bluntly—particularly plainly and particularly bluntly—what the hell might his concern be with land at Pairc Glas, when it occurred to him that Maurya Flaherty had land there, and that she made this over to Nancy on her marriage. The same grim smile came into his face as before; and the cunning, crafty look of a hunter who meant to beguile his prey.

He looked back at the fire, and said roughly:

“Wouldn’t they have the proper sort for Pairc Glas beyond? They’d be knowing the quality anyways.”

Eoghan walked right into the snare Michael had set for him.

“That is so now,” he said. “And they’d have them boxed surely. But whether or no, those are good spuds. They’d be worth four shillings a hundred, as they would.”

There was no pleasure in snaring a man who was trapped so easily; and Michael said contemptuously:

“You might be saying three-and-six, or three shillings itself, and that might bring them.”

“Ah, but Tomas wouldn’t be selling them for under four shillings, unless it might be swapping. He’d give them first, ’Tis only wasting time that ways, and a person know-

ing the quality of the man." Eoghan spoke keenly and sharply, like a prompt bargainer.

Michael smiled again, and appreciatively; for it was just such shrewd and curt direction that pleased him well. His smile just twisted his mouth, and no more; making his face seem more rock-like and his personality rougher than ever.

"I'll be making my tracks," he said, rising. "You have the house well sorted," he added, looking round. "'Tis better thisways. It was middling badly."

Eoghan did not rise, but leaned forward and lifted the kettle from the hook.

"You'd a right to be waiting for a bite of the supper," he said.

Michael stopped and looked round. Then he returned to his seat.

"Let you hurry then," he said roughly. "I can't be waiting on you all days."

CHAPTER VII.

MICHAEL MCLIR was as little communicative by character as Eoghan himself. He was not articulate enough to love speech over much; and, knowing his strength, he was self-reliant enough not to desire, and narrow enough to despise, qualities he did not possess. Moreover, he felt secretly drawn toward Eoghan, who loved the same things as he loved, who lived as he lived, though in so different a way—drawn toward him even as he had a contempt for him because of the completeness of this difference. Yet the notion of Eoghan O'Clery, son of old Michael Caol who had been put to the waste places of Bogach Fliuch up the river, scheming and devising for Pairc Glas, was too grim a jest to be lost. Rough upbubbings of humour, that said little, yet hinted a state of mirth in his mind too chaotic and too vast to be easily communicated, took place at gable-ends while the storm rushed by and the rain streamed over the land. And just because of the very indistinctness of the information so given the news percolated and spread the more rapidly through the community, in mis-shapen and curious forms.

It would have been strange had Maurya Flaherty not

expected the coming of Eoghan. Yet as she observed Nancy, and her tense irritability, and noticed that Eoghan had not been meeting her, she had been somewhat disconcerted to account for the change that seemed to prevail. A good portion of her life had been occupied with the scrutiny and observation of Nancy; but now not only was Nancy bewildering to observe, and even more bewildering to live with, but she was the dictatress of terms, an inversion of positions that gave Maurya a profound sense of wrong received.

She began to struggle again for the mastery, and was surprised to find the task more easy than she had thought it would be, for Nancy was too fretful and uneasy to do much more than bicker with her.

Then the news began to trickle towards her that Eoghan O'Clery was buying crops and devising their disposition for the land that had been hers; and that he proposed to put into practice on that land some of the theories that old Michael Caol had propounded in days gone by before his contrary way of thinking had finally alienated him from the neighbours; together with certain details of that procedure that aroused her anger in the very degree in which they defied her belief. The matter touched the whole of her life. It cut it away completely from its sources, and overturned all its customary usage. She returned forthwith to Nancy.

When Nancy saw her coming in, and saw her throw her shawl back upon her shoulders, she knew that something was astir, for, indeed, Maurya had recalled to herself all her old strong dignity. With her proud face and high carriage, she looked somewhat like a fate as she went across the house.

"What's the trouble with yourself now?" Nancy said pugnaciously, quick to be first in the field.

"Yourself with your dark ways," said Maurya, sitting on her stool and pulling her splendid shawl about her shoulders. "Is it devising and designing in shifty corners for the land that was ever with myself? Didn't himself never put a hand's turn to it but in my own wishing, and he a head-willed man itself, for some stranger in the latter end of times to take its contrivancies out of my hand? Ah, Mhuire; Mhuire; Mhuire! You have me altogether destroyed; and you, a bad thing yourself, that never brought me good from the day you bit me, and you taking your sup of the milk. The fool I was, now, to let that land quit from me, and I

only wishful to make you contented with the Master. You have me trapped in every turn evermore."

Nancy was utterly bewildered. Having no knowledge of what her mother was speaking about, she was astonished at the bitter vehemence coming from a depth of emotion that she had never yet seen stirred. The strength, the primitive dignity, had become alive and gesticulating things; and Nancy was afraid as well as bewildered. But she let no sign escape her that she was in any way put out of her road.

"Is it mad you are?" she asked.

"Haven't I great cause to be mad? Would any person predict this sort of thing to come to me, I to be put from the uses of my own land? Buying and devising what sort of spuds I'll be putting down, early and late, is it? Himself that's sleeping now had never that mind, and I thinking he'd wake me yet and leave me to my own dispositions till God's time was to come for me. Forby scheming in the ditches, in the bend of my oter as it might be, and laughing and whispering right forninst me, and the Master not fully cold. 'Tis a queer thing to be visiting, I that was full and proud to this day, and to be hearing of myself set by anyone."

"Great cause to be mad, is it?" said Nancy. "You'd find causes right enough, but you're mad surely. You'd a right to sit quiet."

She was perplexed and puzzled. Yet she dared not ask outright what it was that was troubling Maurya, for she guessed it had something to do with Eoghan. She was wild to know what it was. She had great difficulty in maintaining her calm, for she felt as if she were in an ague, so excited had she become. And all the time Maurya thought she was mocking her.

"Let you be laughing plenty; let you be laughing plenty," Maurya said; "but there'll bad days come to yourself yet. A person cannot be going aside from decent usages, and decent usages biding by them in the end of all. It cannot be, Nancy. Where there's shame, there's shame, and where there isn't, there isn't; and that's the way it is, and that's the way it'll be all times, from you or agin you. You'll have what you asked, though you'd not recollect what it was you asked itself. That's the way it is. It's the very way it is now. It's by the settlement of Almighty God, and sorra pity in it. There'll be bad days come to you yet, for I'm

heartbroke, and I put out from the land that has my sweat loaded in it with fifty years. Mhuire; Mhuire; Mhuire!" She seemed suddenly old as she droned by the fire.

"Maybe so," said Nancy, with a toss of her head; "but we'll all be taking our chances. . . . Esht," she added quickly, looking up, "and it's to yourself there's travellers returning."

"Me, is it?" Maurya said, startled.

"To yourself and to no other. Let you sit quiet now. Let you be thinking. It's the old have the notion they're free of their own sayings. But whatever it is is troubling you now, it was yourself that put Eoghan outside that door, and it's yourself that'll likely see him with his welcome at it yet."

"And you have it contrived so beyond me?"

"It's neither contriving nor . . . nor denying. It's set to be."

"Didn't I put him out knowing there'd be no happiness come to you with that lad?"

"Ach, who's knowing what'll be happy? It's what's set to be. The night you had the match put on me, and I standing in the wee room was beyond that time, moidered with your bargain, didn't I know it was set to be? Didn't I know it any minute he was away out of this place? Wouldn't any person lie easy and comfortable if the bad bed was the only bed for ever? It's not the old that do be seeing everything, though there's great sayings with them."

"Was it keeping yourself for him you were, and he away out of it?"

"Maybe I was then."

"There's no shame at you."

"Where there's shame, there's shame, and where there isn't, there isn't. It's the very way it is now. Isn't it the settlement of Almighty God?"

It was Maurya's turn to be abashed; so she now fell back on craft.

"It's that lad that has you mastered, Nancy. Well now, it's a great thing to be seeing you mastered anyways."

"Likely. And likely I have him mastered itself. Likely we're both of us mastered."

"What's the meaning of that now?"

"There's no meaning at all, and there's every sort of a meaning. Amn't I after telling you when I gave the Master

the loose of my hand in the room beyond there was Eoghan in the front of my two eyes. That's the way it was, mother, and you giving no heed to me. Do you think would I take that man on his two legs wasn't I sure there was other things set for me? And when he came dancing in the *cleam-raigh* it was beyond question. I was heartbroke from that out, whatever was bidding me to lie in his bed. It'll go to its end now, and let you not be crossing it any more."

Maurya was silent for a long time. Then she fell to droning by the fire.

"And so he'll be designing crops now. He'll be planning and scheming the land is loaded with my sweat and labour with fifty years. Mhuire; Mhuire!"

Nancy looked up sharply at her with a sudden understanding. So Eoghan was already devising for the state to be! Her heart beat violently at the thought; and she was almost afraid of the nearness of the thing.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE thought that Eoghan, whom she awaited, was contriving at his distance, remained with Nancy throughout the days and weeks of tempest. For the first days it brought her a joy such as she had never yet known in her life. Maurya, already sufficiently puzzled at her changes, was never more mystified than when she saw the smiling, joyful, even gentle, Nancy that had emerged from their conversation. She was almost reconciled at being put forth from her land when she heard the songs Nancy sang about the house; Nancy who had not sung since she was a child.

She was transfigured. She was as much surprised at herself as Maurya was, and even laughed delightedly at the change. Then as Eoghan still did not come to take her joy at its flood, she began to feel anxious and troubled. She discovered something displeasing in the thought of someone calmly disposing of her rights, and making assumptions with regard to herself. She determined not to make matters flow all so easily; and vexation warred with her joy. Yet when Eoghan came all this was swept away by something quite different.

For two months, almost without abatement, the storm had

continued; and finally the wind had swung round every point of the compass—from north-west to north, north-east, east, south-east, south-west, and back to its starting point—and had barely slackened at any point: pivoted as though Earth were in some strange dance, in a curious maddened revelry that knew not and cared not what it did so long as the ecstasy continued, so rapid were the changes. Then, about a week before Christmas, on a north-easterly gale that blew across the sodden land like a scythe, snow and frozen sleet began to be driven in clouds across the face of Earth, coming from the mainland, and an intense cold enchained everything. Within half-an-hour the whole change had been wrought. At mid-day a hard gale had blown from the north-west. As Nancy and Maurya sat at their dinner the change was complete.

“Let you be abroad and bring in the lambs, Nancy,” said Maurya. “Let you hurry now.”

“I cannot,” said Nancy. “I couldn’t be seeing. A person couldn’t be seeing where she’d be going, and it that thick as it is.”

“’Tis no time to be talking. Let you be stirring. Would you have the things destroyed on us? Where’s the use complaining? Go on, now!”

Grumbling, Nancy put her shawl about her, and went up the heath in the teeth of the gale. She went slowly, as though every instant would see her retracing her steps, for so thick was the sleet, and so blinding, that her task seemed hopeless enough. Moreover, she was afraid. She knew every foot of that heath, but this was like being lost in a fog, and no familiarity prevails against fear.

Yet she went on, slowly and reluctantly, the sleet stinging her cheek till she could have cried. She was beginning to fear the top of the bray, where the full force of the storm would be felt, when she heard the barking of a dog, and heard the voice of a man guiding it.

“Eoghan! Eoghan!” she cried out, and stood still.

In a minute she saw the figure of a man striding through the storm toward her.

“I’m after the lambs and the cattle,” she said, plaintively, when Eoghan came up to her.

“Wouldn’t these be them?” he said curtly, and then jumped away again through the storm calling his dog, whose barking was to be heard all the time.

Then he was back again, looking about for her.

"You'd a right to be seeing the wild geese went over to the rocks this morning, and they passing over you. Didn't the cocks and the plovers leave the hills, and you in the most way of them? Damn the sense at some people." And he was gone again.

She heard him calling through the storm, and the barking of the dog mixed with the shrieking of the wind. She stood where she was, dazed by the rapidity of his coming and going. Nor did she now notice the cold that lately had chilled her to the bone.

"We'll be after them now," he said, reappearing through the storm.

She followed at his side. She felt rather like a flood buffeted about by a speeding torrent; yet she struggled to assert herself.

In silence she went by his side, for all his attention was before him.

"The sheep were abroad, but the cattle were for home," was the only remark he vouchsafed her as he went, shouting at her through the noise of the storm. "I was after those that are with myself all the day."

By the time they had gathered the cattle and sheep in the stable Nancy had succeeded in arousing herself; and as they stood in the dim light there she said deliberately:

"I didn't see you with the long time."

It was her intention to make him aware of herself. She resented, from him, this treatment of her as a part of the business in hand, however necessary that business might be. She could only dimly see him in the gloom of the stable. He could see her better than she could see him, for she had come in first, and the grey light of the driven snow without fell upon her as she turned toward him, whereas he was only outlined against it. Yet as he turned sharply to her at her words, she felt him stiffen and harden, as if repelling her.

He was silent for some time. So also was she silent; for she was utterly bewildered. There could be no mistake of his hardening. She felt it like something assailing her. And so she was silent.

"I'll be coming out to you with the New Year," he said, like one constrained at last to speak.

She heard his voice quiver with the words; and, thinking

he kept his distance till she first bridged it, she put her hand upon his arm. It was hard to her touch; unresponsive; and when she kept it there awhile she felt it trembling beneath her hand. She had at least broken up his attention to an appointed task, for he was shaking before her. She could see him shaking against the light of the door.

"You'd a right not to be coming if you've no liking left for me," she said, withdrawing her hand.

"Myself, is it?" she heard him in a choked, hard voice.

She expected to be taken in his embrace. She awaited it, for she knew with a sure instinct that he was trembling with passion for her, and that knowledge gave her a wonderful exaltation. And she was disappointed and angry when that embrace did not come. Her very body was in pain for the lack of it.

"It's queer the way you are," she said in a low voice. "but men do always be queer, liking and misliking every girl anymore, like the winds do be passing."

He gripped her arm as she spoke, and though his fingers dug into her flesh, the pain was a pure delight to her; it was almost an intolerable delight. She had hardly finished speaking when he was replying to her, in words that stumbled over each other.

"Me, is it? Who was it turned from me in the past times? Let you be telling me who was it? Oh, Nancy, Nancy, why did you do it, and we in the latter end with a thing between us we'll maybe never pass? Will you tell me why did you do it? Haven't you it all scattered now, though it was set to be evermore, and we that could have gone on that time with the hearts in us like the stars and the great times all before us? We could, then. There was never the romancing lovers of the ancient times, that did be coursing the world with the young grasses showing, and the birds to be singing and they walking on flowers, had the like of what was before us in the houseen I was scheming, with but the two of us only at the heat of the fire. Did you ever think of that now; and the two of us that are astray now, with the kisses like beautiful flowers between us? But you have it all scattered now. 'Tis flittered now, muise. Isn't there a wake betwixt us; and the blistering words I was saying the time. . . ."

He stopp'd abruptly, as if afraid of himself; took his hand

from her arm and held it stiffly at his side; and moved away till his back was to the stable wall.

But she did not notice his abrupt end. Hardly did she notice his retreat from her. She only knew that his hand no longer held her arm.

"I wasn't rightly knowing," she said almost sullenly.

There was a long, long silence between them. He was trying, obviously trying, to master and control himself to a course of action he had set himself. She was trying to piece out the past.

Then she looked up at him, and saw him standing with his back to the stable-wall, staring at her. In the grey light that came in at the door beside him she could see his left arm stiff at his side, with the fingers of the hand tightly clenched. She was about to speak when she heard him speak, in the same dry, hard voice.

"I'm knowing. I'm knowing. I'm knowing. There's a thing now must be sorted. And you that have the past time ruined."

"Eoghan," she said, not heeding him. "Eoghan, lad!" she said again as he still did not heed her. Then she went right close up to him; not in any coquetry, but in a quiet gladness, and partly because of the sudden catch of pity for him that went through her body like a pang of pain.

She took hold of his two hands, tightly clenched as they were, and held herself close to him, her body against his. Then with a great cry he flung his arms about her.

She was crushed and hurt, she was almost suffocated, by the force with which he held her to him and pressed her head back with a kiss upon her lips; but there was no part of that pain she would have foregone. She was all the time aware of his terrible passion; and it was her glory as she clung to him. It was as if she had been waiting for some elemental force like this to sweep her up. He did not kiss her more than twice or thrice; but from each kiss she came gasping. Her body was pressed against his as he bent over her, and she felt his whole strength crushing and bruising her; but she gave herself to that pain; she sought it by clinging frenziedly to him when he released her between his kisses. She wished the pain, and he bound his hands behind her and crushed her with all his strength, with his lips locked upon hers, till she was swept away out of all consciousness as if bruised in a flood.

Then she heard a cry; she saw him running through the door, outlined against the streaming snow; and she realised that she was lying on the sand of the stable. She lifted herself up, feeling bruised and sore in her body and arms; and went down to the house.

"Have you them all found?" said Maurya, looking up at her.

"It was Eoghan put them back. He was minding them," she said, with a kind of song in her words.

CHAPTER IX.

ON New Year's night Nancy was very restless. All day she had endeavoured to disguise from Maurya the excitement she had felt; and Maurya at last went to bed herself, leaving Nancy sitting on the bench beside her. So Nancy raked over the ashes, although she knew that it would be much more to the point to stack the fire with turf, and went into the further room, where she had obstinately maintained her separate state.

Then she lay upon her bed fully dressed, and waited. Finding it impossible to lie there, she took off her boots and walked softly up and down its boarded floor. Then she lay down again. She hardly knew how to contain herself, so excited was she, and so fretful of the slow passage of the time. All her attention was outside; and sometimes she drew aside the canvas blind, and peered out into the clear star-lit night, where the fields lay frost-bound yet, though the snow had gone.

At last she heard the steps up the *boithirin*, voices, and knocking at the door. She heard Maurya from her bed ask who was there; and, getting no reply, go over to the door and repeat the question. A voice other than Eoghan's replied; and she heard a match being struck and the bar of the door being pushed back.

Then she heard her mother call her.

"Ach! it's on me in the end. Let you come out, Nancy, now. Let you come out. It's with you it is. I'm nothing in it."

She put up the wick of the lamp, waited awhile, cunningly

made some show of disarray about her dress, and then went out.

Eoghan was there with Seumas Clancy the smith and Michael McLir; the two former of whom were dignified, whereas Michael had a grim, set smile on his face. They were standing in a knot near the door, and Maurya was sitting on her stool with her shawl over her bowed head.

"You're welcome now; you're welcome; let you be sitting, and be friendly," she said, drawing chairs toward the hearth. "You'd a right to be making them welcome, and to be decent and neighbourly," she added sharply to Maurya.

Maurya made no reply, but continued to sit with her hands clutching the shawl she had thrown over her head; and Nancy found her relief from the awkward situation, and from her own tense and excited emotion, in raking out the live sods and building a fire.

In the meantime the men sat in the circle she had made with the chairs. Seumas Clancy and Eoghan sat with a stiff and formal uprightness, as though resolved to see nothing and perceive nothing beyond the expected ritual, and Michael McLir with a lurch and a shuffle, as if resigned to the fact that the whole thing was lugubrious beyond his power to repair. And when Nancy had built her fire, and sat up on the bench opposite Maurya, they all remained for a long time in a stiff silence, no one of the company looking at any of the others; till at last the smith broke the silence.

"Well now, it's no use remaining so," he said, "the night's getting on, and we'd best be getting to the business."

He spoke towards Maurya, and gave her foot a kick with his to indicate that it was her he meant.

Maurya lowered the shawl, and looked up at him.

"I'm nothing in it," she said. "Didn't I have her name put down to the land, and didn't I leave the house at her, to settle her mind? She's choosing now, and I'm finished out of it."

"Let you come with me to the room beyond, anyway," Seumas said.

"I will not, now," Maurya answered, burying her head in her shawl again.

"Come on," he urged.

But Maurya made neither reply nor movement to show that she had heard him. Nor did the others betray by any

sign that this dialogue had any relation to them. Only Michael McLir seemed to have an increased conviction of the awkward position into which he had been inveigled. Neither Eoghan nor Nancy made any sign. Both were thinking that possibly something was due from them—Eoghan as the leader of the expedition, and Nancy as the woman of the house—but they both felt that the next step lay with the smith.

Seumas felt this himself. He was quite calm and extraordinarily dignified. He rose up, and put his hand on Maurya's shoulder.

"Maurya Flaherty," he said, "we're middling old acquaintances with the most years on us. Let you come with me now, and we'll be talking in our own ways. Come now."

Maurya rose up and followed him into the further room.

The others maintained the same stiff silence. Nancy made an attempt at conversation by asking Michael if it were still freezing, to which Michael made a reply that she could not clearly understand, though the question seemed simple enough, and so she said no more. Not only was their conversation blank, however; their minds were blank also. Yet, if blank states may be spoken of as qualified, each had a quality of its own. Michael protected himself against a lugubrious position by grim contempt. He was waiting for the proceedings that should ensue. Eoghan kept the mental aloofness he had maintained all the time as his only protection against the emotions and torments that waited to rush over him if he turned for an instant to heed them. He was like a hewn figure sitting on his chair. And Nancy, half-glad, half-fearful, was like a sea that changed its colour every instant.

Seumas Clancy and Maurya Flaherty were gone for three-quarters of an hour before they returned; and when they came into the room Maurya went straight up to Eoghan.

"What will be, will be," she said, putting out her hand to him. "If we're to be livers in the one house, there'd best be few crossed words betwixt us. I was fearful against this day, and so I have the worst of it over. Maybe it's the will of God. I'm very wishful there may be luck with you." And having shaken hands with him, she sat again on her stool and looked on the fire.

Eoghan also sat, on the chair beside her, and with the

same stiff dignity he had shown hitherto, as if he were dead to all emotions and thoughts. The smith waited for him to say or do something; and then, to cover the lapse, he said energetically:

"Let you be moving, a *mhic o!* We'd be wanting something to drown the match. And be rousing the neighbours." And then to Maurya he added: "He has the refreshment arranged, I believe."

"He would have," said Maurya.

Eoghan rose to go, but Michael was before him.

"I'll be going the ways myself," he said like one who was anxious to be out of it, and to hasten the chief interest.

It was a strange *cleamhnas* party that awaited the coming of the company. Seumas, rather resentfully, tried to arouse a conversation, and the only one to maintain it with him was Nancy. The other two kept a brooding silence; and Seumas, glancing askance at them in the intervals of his conversation with Nancy, wondered of what they were thinking. Eoghan puzzled him most; for whereas Maurya was obviously brooding on what had at last come to pass, Eoghan was like a man whose mind was not in the house at all.

"He's fretting about the Master, likely," he thought. "Muisse, why cannot a person let what's finished be finished, and to be taking the times as they do be coming on? If he's thinking it's on the head of him itself, isn't it finished all the same? And he getting his will in the end, and the thing he did all times be craving! By gob, there's queer things in the mind of a man! And himself as decent a lad as I wish to be seeing. Muisse, muisse, it's queer enough. He's as fixed as a statue."

All the night it was the same. Eoghan's formal dignity with the few that came in was the final proof that the general judgment was right that regarded him as a queer, proud sort of a man. Michael McLir had come for fun; and proposed having it; and, with his rough horse-play, abetted by porter, it was he who was the life of the party.

It was he who in the end drew Eoghan out to the dancing. Nancy to escape from the mental torment of sitting about the fire with Maurya, Seumas and a few of the elder men and women who had come in, and of watching Eoghan's stiff and formal manner, had already joined the company. And Eoghan was still sitting, as he had sat all the night,

hardly exchanging a word with anyone—except, oddly enough, now and again with Maurya on the chances of the spring and the changing of potato crops. Michael had been eyeing him for some time, as though he had found the spectacle tempting. Then, having secured Nancy for himself as a partner, he drank a couple of cups of porter, and bounded across the house, seized Eoghan by the wrist and dragged him from his chair. Eoghan, when he realised what was happening, resisted indignantly; but being caught on the run, was unable to stay himself till he was swung opposite a girl whom Michael had gleefully caught on the way with his other hand. The whole house shouted at him, and Seumas called to him to be in the fun, and to be no make-weight; so Eoghan danced.

It gave Michael McLir great amusement to watch Nancy's sulking reluctance to continue the dance, to see her glancing continually at Eoghan. It was quite clear that she wished to conclude this dance at once, and to dance the next with Eoghan for partner; so he swung her about roughly; and when the player on the melodeon tired he called to him loudly to be playing on, and would not let the dance cease till all were thoroughly exhausted. And, with not the least attempt to disguise what he was doing, but rather with a rough merriment that made the whole thing obvious, he kept Eoghan dancing all the time and never let Nancy get a chance of dancing with him, though he devised it so that she passed him, or came opposite him, in the reels.

At last Nancy managed to get to Eoghan. She whispered to the lad at the melodeon and led away at once on one of the newer dances that had been brought in to Maolan. It looked at first as if Eoghan did not know who it was dancing with him; for if he was excited, he had been excited ever since he had begun dancing. Moreover, Michael, who had been butlering, had been handing him cup after cup of porter.

As Seumas the smith watched him he saw him, after the first few turns, suddenly look down at Nancy; and for a moment or so it was Nancy who led him, and not he who led Nancy, so fearful did he seem. Then Michael passed him shouting; and in an instant Eoghan almost swept Nancy off her legs with the vehemence that came on him like flame. It was not dancing. It was like madness. "There be times when I think the lad's astray," muttered the smith.

For Eoghan never once took his eyes off Nancy's face. As for Nancy, this was what she had played for, all unconsciously. To be swept by such flames was her only chance of being lifted out of herself.

The only one who kept the dance with him was Michael; who shouted and roared as he swept his tired girl about. Those of the others who watched Michael shouted with him, and laughed, and, finally caught by the contagion, came into the dance again. Those who watched Eoghan were frightened, and reminded one another of the night when Nancy danced with the sergeant of the *cleamaraigh*. Nor did the dance cease till the player flung his melodeon on the bed angrily and declaimed against the unfairness of his task. Then Eoghan, leaving Nancy in the middle of the house where he had ceased from dancing, went straight across the house and began drinking porter. Returning at once, he took hold of Nancy again, and waited. While the others induced another lad to play, he stood there waiting.

So it was for the rest of the night. There was something of the happy child about him; something of the strong, passionate man; and something almost unearthly. The lads delighted in the lead that was set them; the madder the better, for their mood. The older people, drawn from their talk, watched doubtfully for a while, and then began to pass out of the house.

Only Seumas waited. He called the finish at daybreak, and drew Eoghan away with him. Whether Eoghan was drunk or not, he could not say. He had taken enough to make him so; but as Seumas watched him carefully and cautiously he could see him walking beside him stiff and straight up the road, with his eyes fixed intently ahead and a strange light shining in them. It was as much as Seumas could do to keep pace with him.

Neither of them said anything till they were opposite the smith's house. Then Eoghan turned to him.

"I'll be coming in with you," he said.

"Do now," Seumas said. "You'd best have a bite of the breakfast, and a sleep maybe. It's little use going the ways to your own place, and it cold and all."

"I'll have to be travelling to the priest yet, mind you." Eoghan was not looking at him. He had still the intent, wild stare ahead of him.

Seumas waited, wondering.

“ I doubt, *a mhic*,” he said slowly, “ he’ll not be marrying you all that easy, and all that was talked of that time.”

Eoghan looked at him. There was the same wildness about him, but withal a kind of boyish cunning and gleefulness.

“ Oh, he will; he will surely. . . . Do you know what will I say to him? ”

“ What will you say? ”

“ I’ll be telling him how it was, in soul, with the curse I put on her marryings and weddings, and the end came to the Master. Listen now. And I’ll be asking him if it isn’t the proper turn-out for me to be putting myself under the same cursing. That’s what I’ll say. He’ll agree to that now.”

Seumas did not like Eoghan’s searching scrutiny of him; he did not like his irresponsible laughter; so he led the way into his house without a word. Yet all that day Eoghan’s words made him uncomfortable. Were they a sudden freak of cunning, as they had seemed to be? Were they a drunken madness? Or were they something more: a sudden revealing light? Seumas felt very uncomfortable.

CHAPTER X.

WHATEVER the arguments were that Eoghan used, the marriage was not delayed. It was arranged for the following day.

Eoghan informed Seumas as he passed; and the smith noticed that he was still in the same excited state. He asked him if he had been drinking; and Eoghan laughed—an excited boyish laughter—as though in assent. Yet Seumas had a feeling amounting almost to conviction that Eoghan had not touched a drop since he had left him. After his unhappy discomfort of the morning (he had not worked at the forge at all so uncomfortable had he been) the smith wished to have a talk with Eoghan, despite his delicate reluctance; but it was clearly impossible to talk with him while he was in this mood; and so he did not try to keep him.

When he left the smith, Eoghan went straight back home

to attend to his cattle (not having been in Maolan over the previous winter, he had not many lambs) and to see to his dog. Then he set back again to the village. He called at Padraic McLir's on his way, and, finding that Padraic was out, he went on to see Tomas.

Michael, who had been sleeping, was having his dinner, and Cáit was lighting the lamp for Tomas who was reading an old book of the Master's that Eoghan had given him.

There was none of the accepted calm and matter-of-fact ritual about Eoghan's entry.

"Let ye be coming out with me now," he said, striding into the house.

Tomas looked up over his shoulder, with his usual cautious scrutiny; and Cáit came forward at once.

"Be sitting; be sitting," she said. "You're welcome, and you'll be married in the end now. That's a good thing surely. I'm wishing luck with you."

Eoghan hardly heeded her. He waited just an instant, on an instinct of courtesy that arrested his excitement and made him for the moment a fine and dignified figure; then repeated his demand.

"You'd a right to be sitting," said Tomas quietly. "There's plenty of time to wear your boots walking if you've a mind that way. Wait yet."

"I will not," said Eoghan. "Let you come now."

"Muise, where's the hurry? Can't you be sitting?" Cáit protested.

"Come on, now," Eoghan said angrily.

Michael was already waiting for him. Eoghan's visit was very opportune, to his way of thinking; for he had intended going himself when his dinner was finished. And Tomas rose slowly, nodding his head like one who knew that the simplest method in life was to humour a drunken man, put his book away very deliberately, and signified that he was ready to follow.

At the door they met Padraic, and took him along with them. Eoghan walked ahead with Michael, and Tomas followed behind with Padraic.

"He's excited, I think, now," said Padraic, as a conclusion to which he had arrived.

"He's drunk," Tomas said. "He's very damnably drunk, mind you. Ach, didn't he have to wait the long time before his time came? It had to come, then. I said that

at the first. There's queer things in it, I'm perceiving. But isn't it strange now the way a man of that sort goes with the drink on him? 'Tis like the hills lighting up to the stars and the heath burning; there's no saying where it'll finish. And maybe never again in it. That's the way now; that's the very way, and let you heed me. Ach, but 'tis equal."

Seldom had Eoghan been known to go into Sean McLir's. Whenever he had come, he had taken his drink by himself; or taken it from, and returned it to, whoever had stood next him; and gone again as quietly as he had come. His visit, therefore, on this occasion created some surprise to the few who were there. Certainly they had no cause to regret it. Both to them, and to the others as they came in, he was prodigal of his bounty. Tomas tried to check him; Padraic tried to check him, and finally refused to take any more at his charges; Sean protested from behind the bar, and finally the house protested.

"'Tis foolish spurring a willing horse," said one. "Isn't your string long enough now? It's the shoulder that's willing ought to have a rest. Let some other one take a turn now; or let every man take his own."

Yet he would not be checked. Not only was he free of his bounty, however; he was the life of the house. He exerted a natural leadership that was astonishing. He called for songs, and would take denial from none. Even old Tomas McLir sang. There never had been such an evening at Sean McLir's house.

"I wasn't aware he was all that jolly sort of a man," Sean said aside to Padraic as he watched Eoghan.

"I didn't myself; I did not now; I didn't surely," Padraic said, like a man who really wished to say a great deal more.

Yet, though Eoghan's bounty was wide-cast, and though he seemed all the time to be the only drunken man in the house, Tomas, who was watching him closely, noticed that he was not drinking a great deal himself. That puzzled Tomas greatly. He could not fathom it, however he sounded it.

When Sean McLir, after many glances at the clock, at last signified that it was time for the house to be closing, Eoghan gave Michael the word, and they followed Sean out to the back. Michael, little loth, rolled a barrel back to his house.

Tomas, who had already returned, and was sitting by the

fire with his book in his hand (the ability to read which had diminished during the past five hours), looked over with critical surprise to see Eoghan and Michael roll in a barrel of porter, followed by the beginnings of a company they had aroused on their way.

"Ach, 'twill never finish now," he said irascibly, rising to his feet.

"Why wouldn't you let them enjoy themselves?" said Cáit, coming over and taking hold of his arm.

Tomas sat down again, nodding his head derisively, and watched the broaching of the barrel and the incoming throng without a word, but with an attitude more eloquent than speech.

Yet there was a wonder in his mind as well as the derision that marked him. The transfiguration in Eoghan was complete. His excitement had now become more tense, with the result of an added fire and dignity, a more complete masterfulness. There was nothing in him now of the man who withdrew from all because he was certain of none. His acute sensibility had become, as it were, inverted; instead of a diffidence and uncertainty that had led to a pride that withdrew itself, the pride became assailing, and the confidence and certainty of touch never failed him. On his shoulders he carried through the night's pleasure, till the hilarity and fun became at times frenzied and ecstatic.

Tomas himself was lifted out of himself. He sang old songs that none in that company had ever heard from him before, and told *Seanchas* of the Fianna, and of the old Milesian and Fir-bolgian legends (with certain very broad allusions and decorations), till the house shouted at him. Thereupon others came forward with reminiscences of the political Fenians, and tales of agrarian troubles. Indeed, depths were stirred that had long lain slumbering, to such a pitch was the house wrought. And all the time Eoghan kept his leadership, whatever quarrels were afoot. He drank a good deal more than he had hitherto been drinking; but it did not seem to affect him. His curious excitement, amounting at times to ecstasy, never left him, whether he danced or whether he stood.

Then when, with the morning, the company dispersed, he reminded Michael that he expected him at mid-day with the car, and turned to leave the house.

"Where will you be going?" Cáit asked.

“ Will I not be heeding the cattle? ” Eoghan said, turning in the door.

“ Arrah, let you send a lad to be doing that . . . Michael, go fetch a lad. . . . Hadn't you a right to be sleeping? You'll be tired itself.”

“ To hell with sleeping! ” said Eoghan, the grey morning light shining through the door on his flushed face. “ We'll all of us be sleeping plenty yet.” And with that he went out.

Cáit looked over at Tomas. Tomas merely nodded his head. His habit of satire and criticism had dropped from him. He was now a square-set, kindly old man, somewhat sleepy and somewhat drunk.

“ Well now,” said Cáit, “ that's the way it would be. Didn't he have to wait long for the girl, and it coming in the end? He'd have a right to be jolly.”

“ It isn't that at all,” Tomas said, with heavy eyes, as he tried to control his words into a steady speech. “ It's not that at all; and you'd know that, my woman, if there was any sense with you. It's not that at all. It's something quite diff'rent . . . something quite diff-er-ent. But you don't know; and you never will know. I don't rightly know myself. That's so. I don't know myself, so I don't. . . . The poor fellow! The poor fellow! ”

CHAPTER XI.

ON the way to chapel Eoghan snatched the reins from Michael McLir and started a mad skelter along the road. He sat straight on the car, and used but his voice, and a taut rein. The lad driving Nancy on the next car, when he saw what had happened, gave a series of whoops, and started after him. There was a good muster, for the transformation in Eoghan had been rumoured abroad—his invitations, moreover, were broadcast—and the whole cavalcade, cars and horsemen, followed the lad, and raced up the road with shouts and whoops.

Tadhg and Mary Quilter were waiting on their car at Coisabhaun, intending to follow the procession up the hillside. He was on his dignity; and when the riotous cavalcade rushed through the village he did not know what to

do. The space between him and the last car was increasing considerably when he flung his dignity aside, and whipped his mare to a gallop, joining in the shouting that came down the hillside toward him.

All the older people, according to custom, had stayed behind, save those who were driving. Seumas the smith was with the cavalcade in that capacity, driving the last car towards which Tadhg Quilter raced; and when they reached the chapel, and the lads led the horses away for a drink at the cottages that stood about the priest's house in a cleft of the hill, Seumas, leading his horse, came up to Eoghan.

"'Twas madness," he said, "to drive racing that way up the hill."

"I'll defy it," said Eoghan.

"What'll you defy?"

"Never mind what I'll defy," Eoghan said, "but I'll defy it all the same, mind you." And he turned toward the chapel.

On the way back it was the same. If it was madness to drive so up the hill, it was doubly madness to drive so down it; but Eoghan, who took the reins from the start, was not deterred by that. Nancy clung to him delightedly, whooping with the rest. She had taken his kiss (that, in the old rite, united them) with a strange fear, so peculiar did he seem; and she had followed him out from the sacristy with the same misgiving, rebellious and angry because of that misgiving; but these things were banished now in the excitement of danger. Thus it was she would wish to be lifted out of—and lifted through—life; and she would not let Eoghan listen to the protests from behind, even if he had had a mind to do so. Even when a rider was thrown and stunned at the foot of the hill they did not stop, but rushed on at full pace.

Bread and butter stood in heaped piles on the board when they returned; and Seumas came in for the dinner, leaving a lad to take on his car. He had heard of the previous night, and was troubled. Yet if he hoped to have a word with Eoghan he miscalculated. In truth, he did not know what he hoped to do; he only knew he was troubled; and his coming into the wedding-house increased rather than eased his trouble. For Eoghan, to everybody's delight but his, kept the merriment at the highest tension of excitement.

Seumas sat with an egg before him, and bread and butter and tea; and with every occasion, outer and inner, to enjoy his meal. He did not eat, however, but observed; and he noticed three things. He noticed that Eoghan, though the stimulator of the merriment, was not himself merry; but tense and excited. He noticed that Eoghan was not giving much heed to Nancy, and hardly seemed to notice her presence. And he noticed that Nancy did not seem greatly disturbed by this, or even to notice it, but that she was herself very excited, like one who hardly knew what she did.

Only at one moment was Eoghan checked and thrown back upon himself.

Soon after eleven, when the dancing was in full swing, two sets of *cleamaraigh* arrived, almost together; standing about the door, in their white shirts and petticoats and tall conical hats that came over the head to the shoulder, under the star-lit night awaiting the invitation to enter. The first set danced in the ordinary way; that is to say, the sergeant and one of his men danced first with the bride and another girl, and so on, pair by pair. When they were finished Michael took them outside for their drinks to make room for the other set, who had desired a separate entry. The second set, however, observed a procedure of their own. The sergeant stood out, and the bride was not claimed till three pairs of his men had danced. Then he claimed the bride, and danced, with one of his men accompanying him, till Nancy would dance no more, so tired was she. Another pair succeeded. Then the sergeant claimed the bride again, and danced with her with each of the men remaining, dancing till Nancy struggled to get free, but was unable to do so, so firmly was she held back.

At first the company called aloud in protest. Then whispers succeeded, and everyone turned to look at Eoghan.

Eoghan was standing in the crowded doorway of the further room, with his arms folded across the chest, staring wildly at the sergeant. He did not heed the whispers; he did not even hear them. The design of the whole thing was too obvious for any reminder to be necessary. At times it seemed as if he were just about to attack the sergeant. The effort he put upon himself to refrain from doing so was patent to all; nor did he seem sufficiently cognisant of the company to try and disguise it.

There was a hush of expectancy throughout the house;

strained and anxious with some, and amused with others. Yet, whether anxious or amused, the company was hypnotised; for it was all a question of whether Eoghan could control himself till the last dance was over. He was sweating with the effort; and Seumas, for one, began to watch for the last dancer with an irritation that he felt he dared not unloose. Any intervention from another might arouse Eoghan's own intervention; and it was not difficult to foresee what that would mean.

He moved quietly over beside Eoghan. When the last dance was over the strain in Eoghan seemed to break; and he started forward impulsively; when Seumas took a tight grip of his arm and pulled him back.

"Esht, Eoghan," he whispered; "let you have a mind of the last time you were fighting in this house."

Eoghan looked at him confusedly.

"Be giving them now," Seumas continued, "as much porter as they'll be taking from you. 'Twill ease you just as well. And better, so it will. An open hand and a closed hand is all one the times a body does be hot. That's the very same queer way it is. Heed me now."

While he was speaking, holding Eoghan with the one hand, he turned to the barrel beside him and handed Eoghan a bucket to fill. Eoghan took it from him, and went out himself to play the host, sending Michael in to mind the house.

When he returned he stood moodily by the fire, all the high excitement checked in him. Lines of fatigue showed in his face; and signs of acute distress in his eyes. Michael, not to be robbed of his pleasure by the responsibilities of butlering, kept the fun stirring with rough force; but after the false strain of the previous excitement the sense of aftermath began to grow. There were signs of discontent; and false efforts; quarrels arose and more and more of the company began to be reluctant to dance.

Eoghan was not even noticed where he stood by the fire. He seemed to have dropped out of the company. He himself was fretful of the company; impatient of its presence; and a great desire arose in him to go out and sit quietly up on the heath, with only Earth about him, wakeful and powerful and august as she is at night, with the great hills standing around in a silence that is like all sounds meeting, and the march-by of the stars overhead. An overpowering desire

for that awoke in him; though some prohibition barred him from going forth to it. The house, the company in it, and all that the house and company signified, seemed swept away, while Earth crowded in from all around and ruled uninterruptedly where these things had played their hour. That vast comradeship pervaded; and he was set in the midst of it with a growing sense of rest and ease. He was like a child being folded to sleep by a great mother, albeit a stern mother. The ease came very gently into his mind, and brought with it images of great rolling spaces, and half-glimpsed presences floating through them as majestic as they were beautiful, in ranks and orders.

Then Tadhg Quilter, who had fluctuated between dignity and a desire for merriment, snatched hold of Maurya Flaherty, and led her out for a jig. The house shouted approval; and Nancy came over at once and pulled Eoghan over to join with them.

Eoghan went with her. He danced sleepily at first; yet his father had carefully taught him the old ways, and he fitted in every step justly, with no slipshod invention to complete the time. Thus his very exertion aroused him. And as he continued, and saw with whom he danced, all his excitement came flowing back upon him.

Yet now it was hectic and strange, without that firm mastery to which it had risen before. He drank freely. He broke the custom of bridegrooms, and danced almost continuously, accentuating the ordered rhythm of the dances as one would who found help in that containing control. But for the strangeness which most of the company still felt toward him, he would, without a doubt, have filled the house with quarrels and with fighting, so irritable and arbitrary was he.

It was past ten in the morning when the last of the company went; and Eoghan sat by the fire with the dregs of his excitement like soilage in his mind. He could see that Nancy was waiting for him; but he felt strangely dead, very uncertain of himself, and very unhappy.

"There's my cattle waiting before me," he said, rising up. "I'd best put them back to this barn." And he went out through the door into the morning.

Nancy rose angrily. Yet, as later she thought of it, this was a very natural action of his. It pleased her, also, not to be solicited; there was comfort in this hard directness,

this restraint and this dignity. It ranked next to the hard storm that lifted her from the Earth.

She stretched herself out on the bed while she awaited him. Yet, though she was very tired, she could not sleep. She lay there, alert and listening for his return.

At last she heard the shuffle of the cattle and the barking of the dog. She waited, and waited, for his entrance; and when he did not come, she went out to search for him. But he was not to be seen. She went to the barn. Sure enough, there were his cattle; the little barn was thronged with the double herd. She went up the heath; but he was nowhere in sight.

She returned to the house, bitter and angry. Surely her marryings were strange affairs! She sat by the fire, vengeful against Eoghan, vengeful against all the order of male-kind, and finally vengeful against herself and vengeful against her destiny.

It was after eight when he returned. He came in slowly, dragging his feet after him, with a bundle of clothes in his hand, and sat on the bench opposite her. She looked up at him, and saw that he looked utterly weary. His face was drawn and haggard; and that stopped the shrewd word she had on her lips.

He caught her look; sighed like a tired child.

"Muise, but I'm damnable tired."

"Let you come to bed, Eoghan," she said.

He rose up and went before her into the room like one as weary in mind as in body.

CHAPTER XII.

MAURYA'S opinion and Nancy's opinion of the new man of the house had an inverted relation the one to the other, rather like a geometrical figure. Maurya withdrew into herself at first, in silent dignity taking no notice either of Nancy or of Eoghan; and the life of the house at first went on as though she were no sensible part of it. Sometimes a whole day passed without her addressing a word to anyone. Eoghan would address, or, without any undignified effort, include her in any spasmodic conversation that prevailed (sometimes, indeed, creating such conversations as would

naturally include her); but she remained an abstracted figure, past whom such things rolled unconcernedly. She remained, with her shawl round her shoulders or over her head, sitting on her stool by the fire, a heavy and brooding figure grown tragically old.

Yet Eoghan's efforts, maintained despite Nancy's contempt for her, succeeded at length; and succeeded by reason of a very simple thing. As she expressed to an old crony: "It wasn't too bad now to have a man in the house who was acquainted with the ways of a farm, and a middling hardy worker forby." That made a joint interest between them, and very slowly, very suspiciously, she began to open out again. She and Eoghan established a real community of interest, a community that left Nancy resentfully outside, a community based on the land. By the time the spring had come, and all three were working in the fields from sundawn to sundown, as Maurya saw Eoghan's labour, and the love he had for the land, as one who was part of it, grown out of it, and thinking for it, then Maurya grew to a love of him that was the more pronounced because it was based on strength and dignity. Their flesh came from Earth, and their sweat watered it again; and as they sat and talked quietly, or worked in silence, they understood one another.

They had come long ways to meet, but at last they recognised one another.

With Nancy it was the other way. Eoghan awoke from a sleep that was dream-haunted and troublous, and, finding Nancy beside him in the bed, seemed bewildered between wakefulness and dreaming. He put his hand toward her with an incredulity that would have been humorous had it not been so pathetic. She had been awake for some time, and lay apart from him, cold and angry. Then he came toward her with a low cry.

For some weeks thereafter she was caught up in a storm of passion and tenderness that left her only dimly aware of the procession of days. Another storm had set in over the face of Earth, fluctuating between occasional sunlit mornings of rare beauty and vexed furious days and nights of whirling hail and snow; but this was hardly noticed by her in the storm that caught her into delight within the house. Both storms, without and within, were curiously alike in many ways. Both rose to pitches that would have been extravagant had they not been compact of

such cruel and intense strength. Both were without reticence when aroused because they were without deliberation in the arousal. Both passed to hours of such infinite tenderness and delicacy that the other hours of self-forgetful and object-forgetful passion became incredible by contract. Both were, in either mood, wonderfully full of dignity, wonderfully suggestive of august stature. And both, by the chance that befell, were conterminous, for so long as there were reasons for Eoghan to keep the house, just so long was he forgetful of everything other than Nancy herself.

Nancy, who had lived in fear of storms, entered the halcyon of her life. She awoke to a self-forgetful tenderness as surprising as it was transfiguring. At times when Eoghan fell on times of brooding and preoccupation, when the thing, whatever it was, that had imposed that restraint and fear of her on him rose up again in his mind, then she would come to him, sit close to him on the bench, and by the nearness of her concern for him arouse him from his thoughts. She grew to love such moments, and even to play dangerously for them, not only because of the thrill she had in this unaccustomed tenderness, but because when he was aroused thus his passion had an admixture of frenzy that delighted her.

She never enquired what it was that troubled him. It did not concern her in the least. Nor was this selfishness, though no doubt it was mixed largely therewith. It was the accustomed right of a proud and sensitive people not to let anything—not even marriage—encroach on personal privacy. She did not desire the knowledge; and he would have resented and ignored any such desire had it arisen. She accepted it as part of the man; and when she found it was susceptible to her use, she utilised it, and played with it, and played to it.

Perhaps it awoke thus more quickly than it need otherwise have done.

February saw some beautiful days. Fishing was resumed. The land, though it was sodden yet, was examined. Bogs began to be scrawed for turbary, and *sleaghain* were dug up and refitted to their handles. The swapping of seed potatoes, both between village and village, and between the island and the mainland or the other islands lying round about, became an active concern; and the slitting of the

chosen crops began. Preparations for the spring were astir in every place; and the children of men flowed back over the bosom of Earth, emerging from the little cabins and sheltered hearths to which they had withdrawn while their mother had her riot. Two or three re-awakenings of riot drove them back again; but there was a change in the withdrawal; it was ready for any instant's re-emergence. For, as Tomas McLir put it, "It'll be better now anymore. For a day's wet in it there'll be two days fine, so there will. Isn't it the light that is lengthening to let the wind away?"

In that emergence Eoghan had his part, resuming an intimacy that had been broken for the first time in his life. He was away most days, herding his sheep for lambing; and while he was gone, so completely did he forget Nancy and the new life that had come to him that he found himself on several occasions returning to the old house by the little river. When he returned home it was not with the confident sense of companionship he had had before, but rather like a man who had been searching for a path he had known and who was dismayed at having lost the clue to it. Nancy, by coming to him in the expectation of that which had lifted her out of herself, only impressed his loss upon him, for it reminded him of something that had entered his life and obstructed its simplest outflow. Had she treated him simply and naturally, he might conceivably have fallen more naturally into the stride of his life again. But she demanded something from him to which, as it chanced, he could only respond by the false excitement and tensity that had prevailed so long in him; the falsity of which now oppressed him because it was becoming frayed with usage. When he did so respond it was the worse for him. When he did not respond, and was troubled and distant, she became irritable and fault-finding. Little wonder that she demanded, as by right divine, the incredible and transfiguring joy that had come to her with a grace divine; but the result was to drive him from her to seek the path for which he had lost the clue.

She became to him like a flame to a moth. A fatality seemed to make it impossible to take the light and heat where they both gave ease. He was burned and dazzled by the heat; or, in violent escapes, he went off to a darkness that had now become impossible. It was one or the other as day followed day. In this, however, the figure fails. It

was not, in his case, the moth that went to the flame, but the flame that sought out the moth.

When James Burke went slowly out every evening it had pleased her well. His ceaseless—because ceaselessly thwarted—craving was an intolerable thing, of which she intended to be relieved by any means. Moreover, he went for porter; which, while gross and often disagreeable, was at least intelligible. But when Eoghan took at length to the same course it was she who was thwarted. Besides, he went, as she discovered, for sitting up on the heath; which was, or should have been, an incredible thing. Where was the sense of it? Either he did it to meet some one else; and she tortured herself with this, though she was convinced at bottom of the folly of this; or he wished to be rid of herself; and that was a theme for her proper anger. Or he was partly mad; and, therefore, rightly to be pursued and watched. Or there was this trouble on his mind, whatever it was, interposing between them again as it had done during those times when he had seemed so near to her and yet so far removed.

Despite a recurrence of the fear of him she had felt in the burying-place, she took to searching him out. She would not let this continue; of that she was determined; and only her determination fortified her against the unassignable, shattering fear she felt when she went up in the summer dusks, or of a moonlit night, and sometimes even when the dark earth beneath a dark star-lit sky flowed like billows of a blacker blackness strangely ominous, and only the northern lights threw a flame up behind the mountains, to search him out and bring him back to the hearth, or even to send him down to the publichouse for male company if that was what he desired. Sometimes she would fail to find him; and then, without her quest to fortify her, she would set back across the heath in terror, in terror of the dark mountains that so oddly seemed to be living, or of the ominously swelling land on which she trod with the same hesitancy as though it were living flesh that would bleed dark blood if it were cut, and generally of the presences that she feared on every hand.

Sometimes she found him. Then he would come quietly and simply without a word, and say nothing all that night, his silence sometimes lasting well on into the following day. Her victories, then, were but barren things, for at such times, and for days afterwards, he seemed inconceivably

removed from her, as though she had but the shell of a husband in the house. Yet it was not always so. When she won him most was after an experience that put her into an absolute fear of him.

CHAPTER XIII.

HE had for a long time been resentful of her interference. He had protested to her that it would be well both for him and for her if she left him to his own ways, even if she had failed to understand them; and despite the courteous dignity with which he spoke, there had been a marked menace in his words. After that it was difficult to find him. That aroused her obstinacy. Besides, when he was with her, he said little to her, treating her like one who needed to be watched rather than trusted, like one against whom he had a grievance that prohibited any chance of workable understanding. She was thwarted and disappointed. She, also, found cause for resentment. She warmed her obstinacy with a kindling of emotion.

It became the issue of will and will. She was determined to lay at rest this thing between them, and not to rest herself till that were done. He was determined that no new relation should hinder the outflow of his life, that he was seeking so painfully to regain though it baffled him. Was it not enough that it should be baffled by the responsibility of words spoken through Nancy's faithlessness, without her claiming now that to which she had no right, that was his own always by the right of his life?

She knew what she wanted. He knew what he could not but be, if he was to be at all. It was a very ancient issue that was between them, indeed.

The issue at times very nearly obliterated all else between them. It was inevitable at all times, they being who they were; and it would have worked itself to its compromise of living but for the things that followed them. It was the darkness that followed them that destroyed the light that might have come.

Tirelessly she sought him out, a gnawing anxiety at the heart of her; and when she failed to find him she upbraided

him bitterly on his return—with a gathering volume of bitterness when she found he hardly seemed to hear her.

Then one night she found him. The moon was nearly full, and its light fell through the clear air, lying over the earth like a white robe. From the top of the bray all the mountains could be seen standing round like fellows of a grave community met in conclave. There was a mighty dignity about them. Nancy had never come so far as this; and as she looked into the valley beneath, that seemed to sink to a vast depth where the shadow of the bray fell across it, and over at the mountains beyond, a great uneasiness fell on her, ripening to a terror that held her tense.

Then she saw Eoghan. He was sitting on some rocks ahead of her, that stood out in masses of black and white where the moonlight fell on rock-face or threw mottled shadows. He was well in sight of her; and she would have seen him earlier had she not been preoccupied with the expectant poise of the mountains. Something about him, as he sat there looking intently across at the mountains, filled her with apprehension. She looked around quickly, and saw the rocks lying in masses in a rough circle about her; and she remembered the vague tradition that a druid altar had been here in ancient times.

She was summoning the decision to call him in a quiet, low voice (for her obstinate irritation and anger had faded away, and fear and awe had taken hold of her), when she saw him stand up and stretch his arms out to their fullest extent. He was as straight as an arrow; his head was lifted up and thrown back; and as the moonlight fell upon his red hair she noticed that his hat was thrown off—though she had the sharp visual memory of his wearing it as he had been sitting.

Then she saw him bend suddenly, and kiss the earth at his feet with the same self-forgetful ecstasy that she herself so well knew. There was nothing crude or awkward about it, but a clean, alert, almost athletic neatness. Several times he did this; and each time he did so he turned further toward her. He seemed to be moving in a half circle. A fear of discovery seized her. Moreover, she was full of curiosity to watch this to the end. So she moved quickly to the right, so as still to be behind him, and to gain the cover of a heap of rocks.

She did not notice, however, that as she moved her

shadow fell right across him. The next thing she knew was that he came bounding towards her. His face was livid. He shook her roughly, and flung her to the ground.

She rose up slowly.

"Is it put your hands to me now?" she said.

"Scheming and spying on me! Haven't you a shame on you that you'll come creeping into any likely place where I'd be wishful to be with myself only?"

"What was it you were doing?"

"Let you be mindful of yourself. If you're asking then you'll never be knowing. That's the way it is; a great cause you have thereby to sit easy and quiet in your own place and to let the splendours of the world pass by you so. Let you not come creeping behind me, for by the living show of the world you'll come to harm, you'll come to great harm and hurting . . . and . . . and maybe more. You've a lovely face, Nancy, and lovely ways that do be shining out from you all times and burning in my mind; but there be times when you'd a right to be walking neatly in your own road, or there'll come a great hurt to you, and no man can say what."

"What were you doing, rising and falling?"

"I was doing nothing. I was troubled in my mind, maybe."

"You were at some dark thing."

"And maybe some bright thing. And maybe nothing. . . . Let you heed yourself, woman, and not be troubling me?" he roared suddenly at her, with blazing eyes, trembling in every limb. "Will you heed yourself, and not be having me put you from me!"

She was afraid of him, for he was beside himself; and, therefore, she was all the more obstinate and determined.

"Is it put me from you?" she challenged, temporising.

He glanced about him quickly, looking for something to give him what he wanted; and saw the streamlet, running from a fissure of the opposite mountain to the lake, gleaming like silver in the light of the moon.

"Will you put the *fiodáin* from its courses? You will not, then. It'll take its travel forward through all times as it did evermore, and any person shutting it from its dispositions will be making mighty havoc for themselves. So let you go your ways, Nancy; or by the faith of my soul I'll be going mine, and that's all there is about it."

She did not know what he meant, but she was afraid. And when he took her gently by the arm and thrust her away she rebelled against his words.

"I will not. I will not. I'll be resting with yourself."

Then the rage he was obviously seeking to control broke out again. He took her in his hands and flung her from him, so that she went staggering forward and fell among the heather.

"Will you go; will you go!" he cried. "You have me destroyed. You have me wasted. All my living is a little thing, so it is, the way you have the light blasted from my eyes. Isn't it enough now, you to ruin the decent clean loving that was with us by a light word, and you to be calling a wicked curse from me will be following your marrying to the end of the world, and me having to quit the dirty dying came to the Master in the way of it, without you to be emptying all my living in the shough of the road forby? Isn't it now?"

"I don't know rightly what you're saying, Eoghan," she said, rising, and speaking with low, rapid anger. "But I know well I'll not have yourself going the way of the devil the same as your mother did, and me to be coming to a bad end. Let you come with me now, for I'll not stir out of it without you."

"What are you knowing of my mother?" he asked, abashed.

"Didn't I hear what the lads were saying, the way she went mad? Maybe you're mad too. Well, there's little hurt in that; but you'd a right to be staying in the house and not to be making a show of it anyway. Why wouldn't you take your porter with the lads if you can't rest easy in the house?"

"You'd be wishing me to take my drink?" he asked quietly, looking sharply at her.

"It'd be better than this sort of a queer game," she said.

"I'll be thinking of it," he said, and went across the heath, leaving her to follow after.

For weeks thereafter he treated her with great dignity and kindness. She felt all the time at a vast distance from him; yet she delighted in his present mood, for his delicate treatment of her played on her as on an instrument till she was thrilled. He sat brooding for hours together; but she did not altogether mind this, for he was within her

orbit, and she felt toward him again as toward the children that all men were. She only felt jealousy against Maurya, with whom he talked of matters concerning the farm. She did not know that there was also between these two a community of withdrawal from herself; and perhaps she would not altogether have been displeased had she known it.

Things seemed to be running into a normal course, despite his restlessness and unease, when one day he disappeared.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE early potatoes had all been dug, and they were busy pitting them. Maurya had gone down to the fields, and Eoghan had followed. When Maurya returned she asked at once:

“Where’s Eoghan?”

“Didn’t he go after you?” Nancy said.

“He didn’t come to me so. I’m destroyed working alone.”

“Likely he went with the sheep. He does be all times with the sheep and abroad over the hills.

“Well,” said Maurya, “he’s a hardy workman itself; and there’s great profit with sheep with a witty minder.”

When, however, he was not back at night, and the cattle had not been put back, Nancy began to be troubled. Words of his recurred to her. Thoughts, prompted by these words, that had made her restive for some time after her encounter with him, crept back into her mind. She put them aside firmly, however, and hardened herself to waiting. She looked very like Maurya as she sat by the fire without motion or expression.

Yet, in her present state, the strain of waiting racked her whole body.

“It’s a wonder him not to be coming,” she said without looking up at Maurya.

“Maybe he’s drinking in the village, though he’s a steady lad.”

“Likely,” said Nancy; though she knew Eoghan well enough to know that there were only certain rare moods when he might take to drinking, and that he was not at present in one of them.

She waited up all the night distraught; and finally she awoke Maurya to share her anxiety, though it violated her nature to do it. She could bear no more of it. Before morning she was in tears.

With the enquiries of the morning they learnt that Eoghan had been seen the morning before at Port boarding the hooker for the mainland. That relieved Maurya's anxiety. Eoghan had at least come to no harm, and no doubt knew himself what he was doing. They had just to wait for him to return. No other course, at least, was possible; though it was a pity, for he was a hard worker, and Nancy was in no state for work. To Nancy the news was of the worst; and particularly grievous in this, that she had to appear to agree with Maurya and to keep a calm demeanour with the neighbours while she was rent with anxiety. What other could she do? How could she tell her fears without unfolding things which it was impossible for others to hear?

So she took her suffering with a hard stoicism. She was hard to herself. She was also hard in her thoughts to him. Yet, as the days passed by, she felt like water, for her desire for him made her hardness loosen and melt even in the very joints of her body. While Maurya was away in the fields she walked to and fro moaning and crying for him.

"I'm moidhered with him," she moaned, "and the baby and all coming. Why couldn't he be like another? Now he's gone from me. But he'll be coming back surely. He couldn't stay from me, and I couldn't do without him, if we were hating itself. It's queer now. He will come surely. But why did he go from me? Why couldn't he be like another?"

She determined at last to go and see the priest.

Father Hinnissey received her kindly, and with a hearty and easy sympathy.

"That's bad news now with you, Nancy," he said. "I'm very sorry for you, my girl; very sorry for you, indeed. He'll come back of course. Just a freak of his. Just a sudden fancy. He's a strange fellow that man of yours; very strange, indeed."

Nancy tried to say what she had ready, but she could not fit in one word, so quickly did he speak, and so continuously.

"Eh . . . what was I saying? Oh yes! He's a strange fellow that man of yours. You should have seen

him that day he came here wanting me to marry you. The way he talked. No respect at all. And such strange things. All about that other husband of yours, James Burke. Anyway . . . what was it I was saying? Oh yes! The way he talked that day. He was excited, of course. Been drinking. Bad thing, porter. Good business clearing it out of wakes. Couldn't clear it out of weddings, I'm afraid. He'd had some. But he was excited too. A lot of talk about a curse. Nonsense, of course. Couldn't be anything else. Very dangerous thing, a curse. It's time these notions were dead. Did he curse your marryings, Nancy, my dear girl?"

"Yes, Father," said Nancy, sick at heart.

"Oh, did he so? That makes it worse, of course. A man has got no right to be tampering with that sort of thing. Playing with fire, that's what it is. Playing with fire. But it's nonsense all the same. He said that James Burke died by drowning because he cursed him for drowning. Well, he did then. What do you think of that? And then he went into a lot more nonsense. I wouldn't marry him, do you see, with all the talk there was. He ought to have waited. But would he take a refusal, do you think? He would not, then. He said the curse was on you yet. The curse for drowning. In all your marryings. What do you think of that? He said he'd have to be marrying you so as to get himself put under the curse. Fantastic. Ah, yes, fantastic. . . . That's the word. Fantastic. Fantastic. He said it'd be the justest thing to wear the curse himself. Wear it, wear it, was what he said. I thought he'd go mad, so I did. Well, anyway, he was contrite. And it was the quieter way not to let him moidher the whole countryside. And if he wanted to marry you so as to wear his own curse for drowning, wasn't that right and proper? . . . The hooker didn't go down, I suppose? Now, now, don't worry. I was only funning. Those things are all nonsense. . . . So don't trouble. Don't trouble. He'll come back again, so he will. It'll all come right in the end. Like a good story. But he's a strange man. That's what's at the bottom of it all. Strangeness. Strangeness. Queerness. Madness. I gave in to him. You'll have to give into him a bit. And keep him straight in the future. You can't get everything your own way. Perhaps there was a quarrel. A disagreement, maybe. Well, you can't have it all your own way. Each has to give in to the other. Mind that. . . .

Well, good-bye, my girl. Don't worry. It'll all come right in the end. I'll be praying for you. I'm very, very sorry for you. Very, very sorry. Trials and burdens must come.

Well, good-bye! *Beannacht De leat.*"

Whatever it was that Nancy had intended to ask him (and she was not very sure herself what it was) she felt now that she had been answered to repletion. She went back along the road through the soft summer day, moaning to herself. A slow wind, coming from somewhere beyond the mist, cried around the mountains in the distance, and came sougning over the lake. Yet she was not depressed by the day. She did not notice the day. She just moaned to herself as she walked over the road; and pulled her wet shawl closer about her face.

Spells of anger shook her. Was that what was troubling Eoghan: the vague thing at the back of his mind? So he came out for her because of some mad, wild notion of taking up the curse he himself had spoken! It was well to know that. When he returned——

Then her mood changed. She knew that this was not the only reason. She knew of her power on him; even as she now came to admit his power on her. His passion, his tenderness, came back to her memory. Yet, but these were slight things. Beyond and above them she knew he had to turn to her, as she had to turn to him, even though, as she put it, "it was only hating itself." She recognised that law between them, that attraction. He had to come to her, whatever the fantastic notion——

Then she became frightened and alarmed. Yes, his curse had been spoken on all her marryings. That was true. She was convinced that James Burke had died under that curse. And now he was under it too. He had come under it deliberately. Would she lose him as well? No, no; that must not be. She must not hinder him, must not bother him, must not interfere with him. When he returned, she must be wiser. (But why was he not like others? Why had he such queer, terrible ways? She must hide them from the neighbours, surely!) Yes, she must not bother him when he returned. When he returned. When he returned——

When she entered the house Maurya looked up at her.

"What was Father Hinnissey saying?"

"He said Eoghan would be returning soon surely," Nancy answered coldly. "He was saying Eoghan was a

queer man, and was to be let have his ways. He said he'd be returning when he had his business finished, and us not to be grieving. He said he couldn't stay away long, so he couldn't."

"Peadar Sean is after saying if he didn't return soon, and you to go to the Union, they wouldn't know this house was with you, and would be searching for him themselves to be quit of the expense of you."

"Let Peadar Sean mind his own matters! What's he in this house, interfering and meddling? Eoghan had his own business with him, and damn the one of me knows what's it to do with any other person. Peadar Sean, is it? Peadar Sean putting his dirty whiskers in this house like any old goat in a gap! He that's not to the belt of my man! He and his dirty Union! Let me not find Peadar Sean meddling with my man, or he'll go creeping back the *boithirin* with a halt on his slender shin. That whiskery thingeen, muise!" And she sat on the bench rocking herself, resolving to harden herself to patience.

CHAPTER XV.

EOGHAN went in obedience to an impulse that had not formulated itself. It formulated itself as he went. He had been restless and distressed; his life had run underground, being stopped of his natural outlets; a medley of causes in a medley of forms seemed all to drive in the one direction; and he had gone out of the house for the fields before he actually took the decision to dress and go to Port on the chance of a hooker, although he had provided himself with the necessary money a few days previously. But as he went forward the medley resolved itself into one simple thing; that appeared at first to have no relation to any of the causes effective in his mind, yet was truly the direct offspring of them all.

The hooker was late in leaving, so he missed the early train. A missed junction, moreover, (resulting from his lack of clean decision), in a not particularly effective railway system, hindered him further, so that he did not reach his destination till the following mid-day. He went through the streets, just as he had done a year before, making his way to the Asylum,

The same nurse attended to him.

"Wasn't it you that was here a year ago?" she asked.

"I was," Eoghan said.

"You're not her son, are you?"

"I am, then."

"She has been asking for you. She has been expecting you. I'm afraid she has been badly with a time."

"Is that so?" Eoghan asked, alarmed. "Do you mean it's dying she is?"

"Well, I'll not say that; though I don't see how she can live much longer. She herself has the opinion that she's going west. That's her way of putting it, do you know. We didn't think she'd live so long; we were expecting her to die any day, really; but she said she wouldn't go till you came, and that she had called to you, to which you'd be sure to answer. It's a strange business altogether. . . . Isn't it rather funny that you didn't come to her all these years? You were away out of the country, I suppose?"

"I was not, then. I didn't know anything till a year . . . and didn't we have words that time?"

"Well, I'm not enquiring," said the nurse, seeing his impatience. "Only it seemed rather strange. You'd better come to her now." And she went before him.

Sheila lay on the bed like a hulk of herself. Her eyes were closed; and, the flesh of her nobly-built face having fallen away, her head looked like a gaunt scaffolding. Her hair was drawn back over her head, and parted precisely in the centre. Her arms lay over the counterpane, and seemed preternaturally long. There was something mask-like about her face; even in its unreal ashen-yellow colour and its blue lips. She was not in the same room as she had been formerly.

"Your son has come, Sheila, dear," said the nurse. (Eoghan noticed the addition of the endearment.) "We've brought him to you now. Here he is."

There had been another nurse sitting reading by the bedside; and, in response to a signal from the other, she rose up and went out, telling him to ring the bell if he wanted anything, or noticed any change.

Eoghan stood by the bedside of this fount whence he had come, looking down at her waiting for some word from her.

"Is it yourself, Eoghan?" she asked, speaking in a low, steady voice, and without opening her eyes.

"It is now," he said.

"What kept you?" she asked.

"I wasn't rightly knowing," he answered.

"Is there trouble with you, lad?"

"Well, there is. But it isn't all trouble neither. It's sort of mixed."

"Did you get married?"

"I did, then."

"You would, I suppose. What else! I was thinking it would be that."

She spoke as though she were blind; with the same assurance and quiet, emotional perception; like one who was loth to open her eyes and lose that confident touch with things that could not be seen. There was also something that explained to Eoghan the employment of an endearing term. He felt profoundly stirred.

But she went on, still speaking in a quiet, steady voice, groping her way through speech.

"There was great misery with myself. I was mad for Eugene. There was never contentment for me except in the time when he was loving me. But could I turn from the great sights my eye was beholding? I could not, then; and I'll tell you for why. If the two eyes were put out in my head, and my two living legs were frustrated from their uses, I couldn't but be seeing the things I was seeing, and be going the same road I was travelling. I couldn't well, Eoghan; and yourself will be best able to follow me out, there being that kind of knowledge with you. I couldn't turn from tripping, and great misery came to myself. I went following my own ways. It's the way it was, I couldn't be doing any other thing, so I couldn't. It was designed so, the same as himself would be queer put about in his living wasn't it for the parts of learning with him. There bees queer things. It was queer to be loving at all, when we couldn't be sitting in the house without us rising agin one another, there was that diversity in us. It was mighty queer us to be hating when the loving didn't go straight roads, and to be loving all the time forby. I'm moidhered thinking of that all the time I'm fast-bound in this house. 'Tis all words, maybe. All words. Maybe it was something else altogether. He was a little maneen, anyway; a wispy, decent little maneen with his books."

She fell into silence, just as though her words had

logically led her there; and Eoghan stood beside her bed, watching her quivering blue lips, waiting for her to re-emerge into speech.

"Well, now," she said at length in a slightly louder voice, "it couldn't be any other way. It was in the will of God to be so. It was in the will of God me to be seeing the splendours of the great people, and he to be reading in his books. 'Tisn't misery and 'tisin't happiness; it's what's designed; and all the rest is words. Those are my conclusions now. . . . And there's yourself now going on the same road. Muise, muise, it's queer to think the world never coming to an end. You'll be learning now from the beginning the same way as I did evermore. It's the roads; it's the roads; it's the roads; and they do be evermore crossing. I do be all times seeing white roads, and they crossing, and on some of them there do be the shining ones going upwards and downwards like candles where the sun does be shining, and on the most of them is nothing but dusty sort of ways, except whiles; and they do be crossing . . . and crossing . . . and crossing."

Her blue lips moved, and little more than a whisper came from them. Then Eoghan, quite suddenly, became aware that she was looking at him. It was not merely that she had opened her eyes. It was just as if the gates had been lifted, out through which she herself looked. Her dark eyes were intent and lustrous, and he felt that she was looking and searching into the very midst of his soul, searching through his eyes. He was startled, but met her gaze steadily. For about half a minute she looked so; then the brightness died, her eyes became glazed and heavy, and the lids closed over them again.

She lay there just as before. It was hard to believe, looking at that gaunt face so wasted and so death-like, that she could have displayed such alert strength.

"There's trouble in your speaking, but there's more than that in the two eyes with you. It's likely she's putting you out of the road. It's very apt she'd be doing that unless she'd be a wonder in ten baronies. But that's not it, well. You'll be stravaiging in every county of the four provinces of Ireland before she'll vanquish you. She'll likely put you wandering if there's no wisdom on her presently. But you're the like of a dumb man in your eyes." She spoke in quiet reflection, searching out her perplexity from every side, and

awaiting the point of view that would suddenly throw all the parts into relation, as loneliness had given her the habit of doing.

"I have her marrying cursed. It's waiting before me; or it's following after me; I cannot rightly say which it would be." Eoghan spread his case before her with the same quiet dignity.

"I am not rightly understanding you," she said. "What way would you be speaking against yourself?"

"She turned—they had another match put on her. Well, he died out of it. It was on the head of me."

There was a perceptible quickening in that hulk of a frame that lay beneath him.

"Cursing or swearing, was it?" she asked quickly.

"Black cursing."

She gave a little moan and slipped down in the bed. Her head fell over on one side.

He stood there stiffly, waiting. Then he bent down anxiously and leant over her, with his mouth close to her yellow face.

"Mother," he said. And then he cried out again. "Mother." She gave no sign of hearing him, and he shook her. Then he turned and rang the bell.

The nurse who had been sitting beside her came in briskly; and, seeing Sheila, hastened to her. She rang for assistance; and for a time Eoghan was forgotten in the midst of their bustling activity. He stood there looking at them vaguely. They had a secret plan of action that was outside his understanding; and he felt particularly foolish in consequence. Then one of them rose and turned to him.

"She'll recover from this," she said. "Of course, she's very badly. She may go any time. You'd better let us know where you are staying, in case we should want you."

The following day he came again. He felt that Sheila knew who it was that was there, and had great delight in his presence. He also had a quiet and deep satisfaction in being with her. Yet neither of them said a word during the whole time he was there. He sat on the chair beside the bed, wrapped about with her companionship, and when the nurse came in, he rose up and went without a word.

During his next visit, on the day after, she spoke again.

"What sort of a place is Maolan?" she asked.

"There be great mountains," he answered.

“ So there would be,” she said.

“ And there does be the sea, singing or sounding.”

“ A person could be seeing the sea from Beann Cruachan, where I was in the habit of going. It was a beautisome sight. . . . With the sun shining on it, it was very beautisome.”

“ There do be the mountains and the sea. There’s great pleasure to be abroad on the mountains.”

“ Well, there is. There’s great pleasure, right enough. A person couldn’t be having enough of it.”

“ And there’s great pleasure to be remarking the sea, and it changing and moving . . . when there’s nothing to be bewildering it.”

“ Likely enough. There’s not many that be going to both. . . . Well, I’ll be taking my way soon. It’s bad to be shut-fast, lad; but my time is on me.”

“ It’s the will of God.”

“ Isn’t it a great wonder they to be putting the windows so high in this house?”

“ It is, well. There’s no sense with some people. I wouldn’t give a *traithnin* to be living like some people, and they high-up itself in the world.”

“ It’s the wonder of the world a person to be seeing a thing and another person to be all astray be the side of it. It is so, troth. There were queer missesses moidhering old Sheila in this house. It was their pastime then. I had a great right not to be angry, so I had.”

“ They’d be gaping, well.”

“ It would be great, us to be in Maolan. . . . What did himself be doing, whiles?”

“ He’d be reading and lecturing to me.”

“ That’s what he would be doing. There’s all sorts. But he’d a right not to take you from me. I was middling lonesome; and you’d be stravaiging alone I doubt. Muise, muise!”

That evening they sent for him. The sun was behind the distant hills, throwing long beams over their shadows through a faint mist, as he went through the streets hastily. It had been wet the greater part of the day; and the evening had the beauty of a sun after rain dispelling the clouds and colouring the air that was yet moist over the Earth.

The beams of the sun shone through the window against the opposite wall as he went to the shadow where her bed

lay. She was breathing heavily; and seemed to be whispering to herself. The shadow mercifully threw a cloak over the death-signs on her face. A doctor was there, and two nurses.

"She's dying," one of the nurses whispered to him. "She hasn't said anything all day since you left, except to ask for you just now. Just go forward to her now."

The others withdrew a little as Eoghan went forward to the bedside. They looked at him in some surprise as he said nothing, but just stood there beside her. Yet as he came her whisperings ceased, and she was perfectly still and quiet.

The room slowly grew darker and darker. He could hardly see her distinctly in the accumulating shadows. Then he perceived that she was looking at him.

"It's myself that have you in the end! Isn't that strange now?" Her voice was very low, but quite distinct. "And it's myself that has my ways in you. You were always with myself, well. Let you not be letting the light go out in you, though there'll be heart-burning for you I can see most well. 'Tis the cross roads a person has the most cause to fear." She still looked up at him; but there was a long silence before she spoke again. "It'll be burning itself out before there'll be fulness. Let you be knowing the things you're knowing; you'll be rightly that way, for all the rest is words. There's nothing in it but the one thing. You'll be heeding me yet, for you've a queer way to be going." She was silent again. "'Tisn't neither following nor waiting. 'Tis all words that. Let you be knowing what you're knowing. I have that wisdom found . . . shut-fast and all."

She made a faint motion with her head, and he bent down and kissed her on the mouth, reverentially. It was like a rite. Her lips hardly moved under his; but as he raised himself he saw a smile pass over her face just like a faint breath on water.

Then he knelt beside her, with his hand clasped over hers. In a moment he turned his head toward the others. The nurse, and then the doctor, came forward; but there was nothing for them to do.

CHAPTER XVI.

"YOU'LL be waiting for the Rosary, of course," the nurse said to him.

"I will surely," he said.

"I'll go and call Father O'Daly," she said, and went out.

Yet as he knelt before the bed and participated in the responses that flowed to and fro, his mind was with her last words. Always his mind was kept occupied with them. After the Rosary he went out and sent a telegram to Colm O'Clery. But that night he waked her alone; with one of the night-nurses to come in at odd whiles for company. He sat near the head of the bed, consciously and deliberately near the body, and hardly moved during the whole night. So he might have been renewing his life at this its source; and thinking out its circumstances in relation to this source.

The following day Colm O'Clery arrived, and another O'Clery with him. Astonished at first to find Eoghan, he began then to upbraid him for not having returned to him according to promise. Eoghan, however, was uncommunicative; and Colm relapsed into a dignified silence. The nurses watched these two men, so amazingly alike, despite their difference of age, that they seemed like repetitions of the same thing at different times, and commented on their cold dignity with each other. It was remarkable because it quite clearly proceeded on a perfect understanding of one another. The coldness of both men was the restraint rather than the absence of passion in them.

At intervals during the night they conversed briefly. They walked together in the funeral the following day, when this likeness was almost humorous. After the burial, Colm turned to Eoghan.

"Let you come with me now, *a mhic*," he said. "We'll be talking, with the help of God."

Eoghan had felt, and appreciated, the fellowship that had come silently betwixt them; also he had been thinking of his old promise to visit Colm O'Clery, which had passed completely from his mind till Colm had reminded him of it on the previous day, so he agreed to go.

"That'll be great so," said Colm. "We'll be putting ourselves in the road of better acquaintance, so we will."

As Eoghan went to settle at his lodging, his thoughts reverted to his mother's words, and thus passed to that which had sent him wandering. He keenly resented the things that seemed to be pressing on him at either hand: Colm O'Clery's hospitality and those who were waiting before him in Maolan, of whom he now became actively aware since that which had impelled his wandering had spent itself. He felt caged. He wished to be with himself for a while in order to achieve a poise from which his life could again be lived.

His first instinct was to go as he had come, as a wind might go and come, without consultation or advice. But the memory of his previous discourtesy of Colm O'Clery was with him; and so he went to the meeting-place.

"I cannot be coming," he said.

"What way is that?" Colm asked. Eoghan's manner was that of clear-cut resolution; and he at once recognised that fact.

"Herself was bidding me mind certain things; and I'll be minding them."

"You'd a great right to be visiting me, and we near related. There's only the *cailin* with me, and there's great pleasure in company by the appointment of God."

"I'll be visiting one time surely, I will; but I have my business presently."

So Eoghan went his way, leaving Colm to return regretfully with his companion. He went walking; and they parted at the railway station.

He remembered the way he had gone the previous year, and he struck along it now. The memory soon became automatic, for his mind was occupied with many things.

All the time his mother's words were with him. Wherever his thoughts turned they met him. They had been spoken as the simple and direct burthen of one soul to another. They were just what she at any time might have been expected to say to him. They were not spoken in reference to any of the details of his life, of which she knew nothing for certain but the bare facts he had told her. There was no very great significance in them; and he felt that. Yet they answered everything completely; so completely, indeed, that as he wandered over the roads and among the hills he was baffled by them. Their very simplicity and nearness to him baffled him.

In some recess of his mind he felt certain that they had some relation to his sense of something that would infallibly meet him; that somewhere and somehow the two things would emerge and answer one another; yet, try as he would, he could not drag that relation to light. He felt oppressed by it just because he could not drag it to light; and his sense of a fatality he had awakened, of a fatality he had had to undertake, deepened in him.

Out of that very oppression he grew avid for the answer to be found in the life before him. He went to it, even hastily. Nothing could appease him, in the state into which he had brought himself, but to take up the course of his life again; and as he took this resolve, and hurried forward, the longing to see Nancy again became almost a pain, even as it had been of old. The desire had grown up in him ever since the distance from her had brought quietude into his mind; and she stood before him fair and fresh, the quest of his days.

As usual, he avoided the road that skirted the mountain and passed round through the valley; he went over the hills, from the top of which the western portion of the island could be seen stretched beneath him, with *Scráig Mór* immediately to the north of him, the great curve of the mountains to *Cruach Mór*, the bogs and bays and heaths within that curve, and the torn and jagged coast-line that extended to the western headland. But he had no eye for these things this day. He went rapidly down the hill, for, shining whitely in the sun-light, a spot upon the distant heath, he could see the house that held Nancy.

She was the only person in the house when he entered. She was pacing up and down the length of it; and when he entered and walked immediately over and sat on his accustomed place on the bench, all her being leapt up in gladness at the sight. She was near to crying so great was her revulsion of relief and joy. Yet she said:

“To hell with you with the moidheration you have put on me! It’s a wonder you didn’t rest out of it, and you giving no heed to me. It’s the way it is I dursn’t go abroad with the neighbours scanning me with a hundred eyes.”

He made no answer, but sat quietly on the bench, glad to be back again. She stood in the middle of the house, unable to take her eyes off him.

“There’s little goodness to be had with any man in all

the world," she continued. "Not in all the world that's stretched out in every place is there but trouble and botheration with men, so there isn't. It's a great wonder with Almighty God they do be in it at all. What brought you away out of it?"

He looked up at her for a moment; and then looked back at the fire without a word.

"Escaping from me, I doubt," she continued bitterly. "Escaping from me, muise! For I wouldn't have you behaving like any poor creature that's dafty in the wits. Nor I won't neither, let you be heeding me now. I'd trouble enough taken with one man drinking in my place without yourself putting disgrace on this house with acquaintances and damnable things."

Still he said nothing; but the gladness died in him and a heavy foreboding took its place as he listened vaguely to her.

"You'd a right not to be speaking now," she said, "for fear you'd let a word from you where you were. But I'm knowing where you went. 'Tis the way all times with men, and they tramping up and down the roads to be whispering with every girl of a dark night." She stopped suddenly, and seemed to be on the verge of tears, though she shook with bitter anger. "Will you not be answering . . . be answering me?" she cried out then, and, without waiting for a reply, she rushed into the further room and slammed the door after her.

Eoghan did not follow her. He sat gloomily by the fire until Maurya came in.

"Did you finish your business?" she said, sitting on her stool. She did not seem at all surprised at seeing him.

"I did, well," he replied.

"I have the spuds gathered," she said. "I had to be bringing help to myself. You were wanted now. There's the oats coming forward presently."

"I'll be regarding them to-morrow," he said.

"You'll not go abroad to the fields this evening likely?"

"I will not," he said.

"Well, let you be resting yourself so. There's time yet; and there's plentiful work waiting before you, so there is."

CHAPTER XVII.

DESPITE her bleak reception of him, Nancy was very tender in her treatment of Eoghan for the weeks thereafter. His absence, shrouded in mystery as it was, frightened her in the face of what she had learnt from Father Hinnissey. She was thoroughly afraid. His own occupation with the words he had once spoken on the heath became as a slight thing beside her terror. She was afraid of anything she might say to distress him; and she was afraid of her fear, for she felt within herself that to restrain and prohibit herself was to prepare for a wilder outburst if any untoward chance should once snap her control.

She watched over him with a wild tenderness as a result. She did not interfere with his coming and his going, although he often did not return till very late at night. She held herself deliberately in check; and she did not seem at all aware that her very apprehension was like a ring around him, or that her wild watchfulness could not but irk him as much as active interference.

What his nature desired was simple freedom; whereas her watchfulness, that revealed itself in a multiplicity of little ways and fretful attentions, made him aware of himself, and so turned what should have been—what, to be of any virtue, could only have been—a simple exercise of his nature, a spontaneous outflowing of himself, into a forced and vexatious rebellion. He could not escape from this self-awareness, for at every hand he met her watchful eyes; and so he lost all joy and spontaneity and gladness in his life.

Besides this, she noticed a new determination in him. In the end he had to support himself by this determination, for the simple outflowing of his joy ceased with the simple outflowing of his life, and he had to turn to resolution where healthful spontaneity lacked; but at first it was a different thing. It was quiet and self-possessed and kindly, so that she was somewhat overawed by it.

And always, in both of them—he as he went about his life firmly, she as she watched him almost fearfully—there was the thought of the words he had spoken. In their different ways they both remembered them. They acted and lived in presence of them. So that the words became almost

like a living thing that settled between them and governed the life they lived.

Yet, if that was the dominant note of the life, that was not all the life—though it is true that most other things set back and flowed toward it persistently. He was very tender with her; and she turned and clung to him with wild affection; so that a clear and pure joy often made their lives as rich to take as ever they had known them.

Particularly was this so as the early days of autumn were shaken with some very violent storms accompanied by heavy thunder. Nancy was tense and over-strained; and Eoghan sat beside her on the bench for company while Earth was shaken without. They said nothing; they did not touch each other; but Nancy, thinking upon it the following day, found that her fear of the moment had passed away where the thrill of their quiet companionship glowed yet in her mind.

It was after the birth of little Michael that her self-will re-asserted itself. Eoghan was not now in Bogach Fliuch, where he could live a life unobserved: on the heath he was always liable to observation; and a rumour reached Nancy that her man had some sort of queer strange acquaintance-ship. Her chief fear was instantly alive in her; and she passed at once into waylaying, obstruction and remonstrance.

The result was that a state of warfare ensued: close, tense and fiercely continued. They were both swept into it before they were fully aware of themselves; and the rapidity and keenness with which it was contested gave them no opportunity to reflect. Moreover, it was waged in silence, without any overt reference on either side; and so it had to continue until some open issue gave them a chance of finding an understanding, even though that understanding were only temporary.

Thus he was a continual irritation to her, and she was as a sore in his side. The winter was mild, though insistently wet, with occasional storms that descended with sudden violence and swept over the land. Eoghan was at his work continuously, abroad on the hills every day heeding his sheep. He said little, but came and went without for one moment letting his comings and his goings slip into a possibility of question by others. It was impossible to question one so self-contained and so dignified, though, after a

day's work, he might go forth at night and not return till Nancy and Maurya were in bed. Maurya wondered a little, and wondered mildly; but a perfect confidence in Eoghan had grown up in her mind, and she accorded him what was due from her dignity to his. Whatever he did was his business, and he was one who knew his business. If he drank himself he was anyway seemly in it; and if he brought no shame with it and gave no trouble with it, and was not ill-affected by it in his work, his drinking, if he did drink, was a purely personal matter; and if he did not drink, whatever else it was he did or did not the same argument held sound. But Nancy, perhaps, was hardly in a position where such philosophic calm was possible. Certainly, she neither displayed it nor made any attempt to display it. If it was to a silent Nancy that Eoghan returned such nights as he was abroad, it was at least a wakeful Nancy, and it was a Nancy from whom and for whom speech would have been an easement.

The year passed, and the new year was some weeks old before that speech came. A north-westerly gale had set in with the first quarter of the moon, each abatement of which was the signal for a fresh upward curve toward ferocity; and now at full moon the wind went over the land with a music in which the accent of crescendo was too plainly heard. Rays of moonlight flashed out and sped over the land like search-lights when some torn space in the clouds went speeding across the sky as Eoghan came down the heath towards the house. He watched them travel across the fields and over the many white crests of the sea, thinking, not of the wild beauty they made and revealed, but of the storm that, he judged, would touch its climax on the morrow. He went with accustomed care because the changing lights made the ground difficult, and some of the buffets of wind made him stand awhile to maintain his balance.

Nancy was waiting for him. Hardly had he raked the fire and entered the room than she attacked him. She had been walking to and fro, and stood by the bed as she spoke. Little Michael lay in the bed, and she spoke in a low voice that made her seem doubly bitter and passionate.

"I'm too long moidhered with you," she said, in continuation of her thoughts, as though his presence now made her thoughts vocal. "Sorra one of me knows why I ever set my two eyes on you, though you're the one I'd as soon

be living with as anyone if you did only be behaving like any other person in it."

Eoghan said nothing, but proceeded to pull off his boots. He only gave one quick glance at her.

She seemed to be trying to restrain herself from speech; but the task was beyond her, and her words stumbled out with the greater effort because of the difficulty with which they were spoken.

"Isn't it a great shame and disgrace on me to have a man given the way you are? Not but that I'd be minding for myself; but it's the shame and the notice of it, and I knowing well there's some dark thing in it that'll be bringing destruction to this place. I'm frightened to my soul with the things that are in it. It's dark you are; and it's bad you are; and there's the neighbours now, and they remarking you. You'd a right to be like another."

Eoghan came over to her and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Let you be knowing what you're knowing, and me to be knowing what I'm knowing," he said. "Did I ever want to be putting you from your road, and what way would you seek me out to have me put astray out of my paths?"

"Don't be putting your hand to me!" she said, springing away from him. Her whole body was shaking.

He looked at her like a man half-reconciled to the incomprehensible.

"A person would be mad itself to throw a decent thing from the hand with a mind that's not contented with the lack of its own wish," he said. "You have your will set to turn me, and didn't I tell you the time before that I'd as soon you'd put me cold and stiff in the shough of the road. You'd have me poured away out of myself to be suiting your wish of me; and maybe I'd be contented to give you any wish if it wasn't the gainsaying of my own nature. So you'll beat away useless there. Let you be coming to the bed, and sleep easy."

"I will not; I will not," she cried out. The sense of something in her she could not properly express filled her with the helplessness that leads to rage. She felt as if she battered against a cliff with him. Nor could she voice her only complaint rightly. "Let you be drinking itself! Isn't there many that does that? But you'll not go to queer ways that'll destroy us in the end. You will not. You will not.

I'll have you stopped surely." She looked at him as though there were no reckoning the bitterness of her hatred of him. Her anger was inchoate; bewildered; and, knowing it was thus, there was something of the consciously pitiful about her that roused her resentment. Her speech rushed on incoherently through abuse, until a thin cry rang out; then she stopped suddenly.

"You have the little one wakened now," Eoghan said.

She went to the bed feeling stifled. Neither of them slept during the night. On rising in the morning the issue was immediately resumed. Their voices rose out through the door into the house where Maurya, tired of waiting for Nancy, was putting down the fire.

She was not merely angry now. She was determined to express herself fully. She was determined to find what it was that baffled her, to make herself see it clearly and to make Eoghan see it not less clearly. When her voice rose in anger, it was as much vexation with herself as anger with Eoghan. He said little, but tried to calm her. He was puzzled with her; and, holding little Michael in his arms he glanced every now and then at her in some mystification. It was this that held him. His wish was to go right out and leave her to calm herself, for he felt soiled by this contention about things that were even beyond mention—things only for silent recognition between a few, though so many were immersed in them.

"Let you quieten yourself now," he said severely. "Are you mad itse'f that you'll be rising your own mind with botherations?"

"I'm not rising my own mind," she said. "Amn't I seeing well that you do be all time putting yourself in the middle and midst of the things that'll be fetching on your head, and bringing to this house forby, and to me and to the *gasur* there and all, the turn-out you're most dreading and that has me heart-stricken all times? That's what I'm knowing well. I'm not rising myself at all. I'm flittered and stricken any damnable day watching you, so I am."

"What turn-out would I be dreading?" he said, looking at her in astonishment.

"You think I don't be knowing well. You think I don't be knowing you had me married to be taking with yourself, Eoghan, the word you were speaking on the heath beyond. I've——"

She stopped at the sight of his face. He had gone white, and stared at her with a curious light in his eyes. Then he put the babe down hurriedly in the wooden cradle, and walked out into the house, where she could hear him striding about.

When she went out with little Michael he was taking bread and tea as if it were a necessary meal that choked him. He soon left it incompleated and went out of the house.

After some minutes he was back again.

“Who was it was telling you that?” he asked of her.

“The priest was telling,” she said sulkily.

He stood there a moment; then was gone again.

He went striding down the road, not bothering where he went. A furious wind buffeted him; which vexed and irritated him at first, but afterwards soothed him. He met none on the road; but when he neared the cabins at the top of the hill and saw some men standing at the gable-ends of the houses he turned away down to the shore.

There was a heavy sea running, and in the grey light of the morning he could see the spray leaping high into the air and carried by the wind right across and over the headland. He made his way over the bog towards the great jagged rocks on which the waves were broken. Cautiously watching to see how far the volume of the waves reached, to the great mystification of a lad putting out cattle he went out upon the rocks until he stood in the course of the flying spray; and he sat there watching the waves swing forward with green foaming crests and pound on the rocks beneath him. With the greatest of the waves he was lost in the midst of the spray that flew round and passed him.

There he sat watching the mighty play of waters. Every troubled thought faded out of his mind; and he lived, not in a vexed distress of his own mind, but in the rush, surge and re-surge of the tons of waters that played beneath him. It excited and fascinated him. There was an extraordinary ecstasy in watching a huge wave mount up in the distance and advance toward him like a living thing, swinging into the coves that were all white foam, or dash into spray that mounted high over his head, so that he could see nothing till it was carried away over the land. He was half afraid each time, and yet he breathed sharply and keenly with a joy that thrilled him. It cleaned him. It exalted him. So to live was to have a life that was more than one's own.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NANCY sat jolting the cradle with her foot, a dull fear distressing her. She was defiant too, for she knew that Maurya had some judgment on her unexpressed. She grew impatient of waiting for it, and provoked it.

“Well!” she said, jolting the cradle violently.

“There’s some,” said Maurya, “that’s the wonder of the world. There’s some that would be complaining agin the golden apples that the Lord God does be choosing for His pleasure in the orchards of the blessed in heaven. If they’re soft and foamy in the mouth itself, like the wine great kings do be drinking, there’s some wouldn’t never be contented.”

“Yourself with the singing by the fire. There was never the cross word twisted your mouth likely.”

“Haven’t you this man sought over the bodies of the dead? And now you have him what’ll please you but to be putting him the same way yourself?—”

“Let you be quiet now!”

“Ah, you’ll not trouble myself. My time’s before me, and I’ll be going to it easy. I’ll not be fearing it late or early; and you cannot put me faster than I’d go myself. But you’ll have a power of men frightened that way, and blistered in the ears forby, before your time’s come, so you will, may God give you mercy!”

“Will you be quiet now?”

“Haven’t you any decent shame with you? Wasn’t I evermore telling you you’d be better to be wise and contented with the one man, and he a middling poor sort of man maybe, than to be romancing with many? And it is the way it is now you’re not contented with putting one decent lad to a dirty dying, but you’ll have another moidhering living with you, and he the one you were all times wishing forby. I’m saying there’s some that’s the wonder of the living world.”

“Be quiet!” Nancy cried out distressfully. “Be quiet now! I’ll not be hearing you, and the hard word you have.”

She went out of the house, and stood down on the *boithirin* looking to see if she could possibly discover Eoghan. She disguised from herself the fact that she was

alarmed, by keeping her attention cynically fixed on the slight cause for it.

A lad was passing along the road, and, seeing her standing so, he stopped, looking up at her with a curious whimsical humour shining in his eyes.

"You'll have your new man drowned on you," he said.

"Is that so?" Nancy said. She spoke in a hard, contemptuous voice.

"It is, well. He'll be drowned surely, forby the Master, and there'll be hell of lamentations."

He seemed so amused at the thought, so quietly reflective at its quaint humour, that Nancy did not know how to take him. She said nothing, and looked away over the fields. But the lad still stood watching her.

"Would you wait for me to be come courting you, Nancy O'Flaherty? Would you? There's great good looks on you, God bless you! . . . But he'll be a muddy spectacle for all eyes."

"What are you meaning?" she asked sharply.

"Didn't I see him crawling forward in the spray of the waves over the big *maolans* on Gob Gé? I did, well. That's what I saw him doing. He'll be battered to stripeens by the big waves that are in it." Pulling up his white guernsey, he plunged his hands into his pockets, hunched up his shoulders, and went off down the road swinging his elbows forward as he walked.

Nancy went quietly down the *boithirin* and walked quickly up the road. She was alarmed. Her mind was in suspense, and she went at once to discover what cause there might be for her alarm.

Meeting someone on the road she let him pass her, and then called back to him.

"Did you see Eoghan?"

"I did then. He went looking for timber on the Gob, I'm thinking. He went over the land to the shore anyway."

Nancy's attempt to maintain a settled unconcern dropped away from her instantly. All the alarm she had affected to scorn rose in her, and she turned about with white face and shaking limbs and eyes that glanced wildly first at the speaker and then to the shore.

"Did you see him go?" she asked with quavering voice.

"I did, well," called the man over his shoulder. "And

I'm thinking he has something found, for we saw him go crawling out over the *maolans*."

"My beautiful man; my beautiful man; oh, my beautiful man, my beautiful man!" Nancy shrieked, as she sprang down into the ditch of the road, clambering over the mearing, and began leaping over the bog toward the shore.

They heard her cry up at the houses. The man who had spoken turned round in amazement at her cry; and watched her go leaping across the bog, gathering up her weighty red petticoat for the better speed. He saw the men at the nearest gable-end cluster along to the south of the house to watch her; and he turned and started up towards them. Then he gave a short, uneasy laugh, and turned again on his business down the road.

Nancy went stumbling and leaping over the bog, crying out, "My beautiful man! Where's my beautiful man? It's on the head of me!" until she ceased for very lack of breath. By the time she reached the shore she was covered with clauber to her knees, and could hardly stand for weakness and breathlessness. Yet she went scrambling along the rocks and stones, moaning to herself, and scanning the shore for a sight of Eoghan.

Her petticoat and stockings were torn, and her very hands were bleeding with clutching at the rocks. She gave no heed to the waves that crashed among the rocks and dashed her with spray. She was terrified by them, but not for herself. She hardly gave heed to the way she went, scrambling over obstacles and slipping among the rocks as all the time she looked eagerly ahead.

Then she saw him. A great wave had dashed high in the air, the height of its spray being carried far inland. As it cleared, she saw him emerge out of the midst of it, as it were. He was sitting forward on a rock, looking fascinatingly at the second of the three waves that came mounting onward with a white crest that hissed forward as its back curved. Just before it curled over, just as it made its last quick leap forward as it curled, she saw him stand erect with arms wide extended, just as she had seen him before, as it were in magnificent welcome.

"Eoghan! Eoghan!" she shrieked to him, but the thunder of the waves about her drowned her voice; and she bent low, shuddering, as the wave broke, dashed high, and he disappeared from sight.

When it cleared he was still standing in the same attitude. He seemed to be laughing delightedly as he shook the spray from his head; but she could hear nothing but the crash of waters around her.

Then, as the third wave mounted, he bent forward, and stiffened himself again expectantly with the same manner of high delight.

“Eoghan! Eoghan!” she cried out. She started forward as she cried; but slipped on the wet rock. She clutched at its surface for support; but her eyes were still on him as she slipped and bounded forward into the cove of foam at her feet.

The tide was on the ebb, and as the waters receded from Eoghan he went forward to keep at the same distance, almost within their power. He went forward very cautiously by habit, notwithstanding the rapturous state of his blood.

As he went forward so a glint of red in the waters caught his eye. He gave no heed to it at first; but it enforced itself on his attention, and he crept cautiously down toward it. It seemed to him as though it were the red of a woman's petticoat. As the wash of the waves carried it to and fro from the rocks he waited till it was borne up near a rock, and, running nimbly down, he exerted all his strength, drew it out of the water, and struggled up the rocks again with it. The water was aflow round him nearly to his waist, and he had to lean forward, using the weight of the body as a kind of anchor, to save himself from being dragged back. So he struggled up, every muscle in his body straining not to let go his burden.

It was until he could breathe in safety that he laid the body down to see who it was. At first he simply stared incredulously at the impossible thing. Then he fell forward, crying out wildly, lavishing tenderness on the sodden body, laughing and crying incoherently.

Then, as it became clear to him that she was indeed dead, he raised himself with a kind of gaunt, hard despair, and, lifting the body, he bore it back toward the village.

He had to rest many times, for the weight was heavy. As he came among the houses a crowd collected around him, but he hardly noticed them. He went straight into the smith's house, where they were sitting at their dinner.

Laying the body tenderly on the ground, he stood up stiff and straight beside it, looking down upon it. When Seumas came forward through the throng he turned sharply on him.

"What'll you be saying to that now?" he said; and then suddenly he sank on his knees beside the body. He was shaking and shuddering convulsively; but there were no tears from him.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE *caoin* of the women died to a close as the last sods were thrown over the grave and the men arranged the scraws upon it. The throng dispersed and passed down through the burying place among the graves; but Eoghan still stood beside the head of the grave. He had not taken a shovel in hand; he had done nothing: he had not even dug the grave, leaving that task to those who took it in hand when they saw his state. He was in a kind of stupor.

Some gave a glance to him as he went, but none spoke to him. Maurya had stayed behind in the house with the child, so that he kept none waiting on him, and they left him to himself as he very plainly desired them to do—even if he were so far conscious of their presence as to desire anything from them.

Yet when all were gone there were still two men who stood by the gate looking up at him. After a time they came up toward him. One was Tomas McLir and the other Seumas Clancy the smith.

"Let you be speaking to him," said Seumas as they came up.

"Ach, I will not," Tomas said. "'Tis you that are knowing his ways better. Let you be talking!"

They stood a short distance from him; but whether he had noticed them or not they could not tell.

"I have no mind what to be saying at all," Seumas whispered.

"We'd a right to be going so," Tomas said. He stood with his sturdy body bent forward, looking at Eoghan; and though there was a grim, satirical expression on his face two great tears trickled down his cheeks on to his beard.

"We'd a right, well, to be leaving the poor fellow to his lone."

"We had not," said Seumas. "There's none but is wishful to know of a person grieving for him. If it's troublesome to him now he'll be thinking of it after."

"Be speaking to him yourself so," said Tomas roughly, shaking himself.

Seumas stepped forward firmly, and took hold of Eoghan's arm. Eoghan took no notice of him, but continued looking down at the newly-laid scraws unevenly patched on the land. Yet there was no resentment in him. He seemed to be waiting to hear.

"Let you not be grieving, *a mhic*," Seumas said. "There's queer ways in the world, and there's nothing rightly accountable. But them that's departed is in better ways surely, or 'tis troublesome living. The Almighty's knowing anyway no doubt. No doubt he is. We're never knowing what's on the head of any man anymore, but there's coming and there's going, and there's a life to be living in every place wherever."

"Ach," said Tomas, "isn't there work to be doing, digging and delving and every sort of a thing? There is now. It'll be us that'll be sleeping in this very place next, and that's the end of it. 'Tis heads or 'tis harps, and 'tis equal which. But 'tis labouring all times, mind you. It was her luck, so it was."

"Be grieving no more," Seumas added. "Things is set very curious, no doubt; but be rising up to the little *gasur* that's waiting before you."

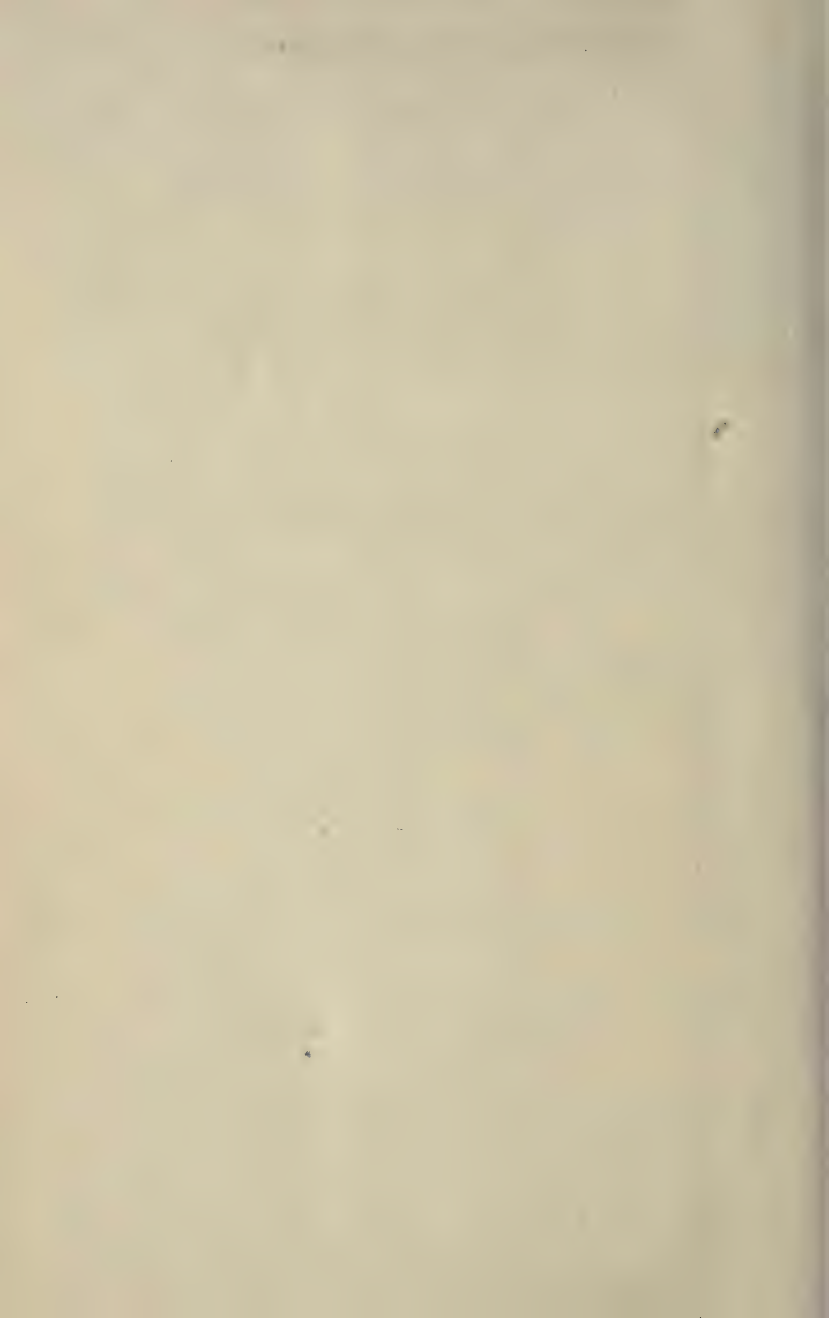
As he was speaking he received a blow in the side; and, turning about; he saw Tomas nodding toward the gate. So he followed him out to the road.

When they had gone, Eoghan turned and made his way beside the hill up through the valley. When he reached the top of the heath he sat on a rock and looked on the circle of the hills opposite him.

The first glow of sunset warmed the air with colour; and save for the puffs of wind that came travelling out of the south-west in token of a coming storm everything was rapt and still. The cry of curlew from the lake below quavered plaintively in the air and made the silence seem the more rapt. It was an austere silence. Earth was gaunt and bare and wild on every hand. It was an evening such as a

myriad evenings had been in her life, and as a myriad evenings again would be. She bred her children; and those that leaned on her bosom she tutored to the strength and fierceness she herself knew; but her gesture of dignity extended over their comings and their goings. She gathered their bodies to her body; and as night fell over the scene, and the eddies of wind strengthened and went singing around the conclave of the hills, she, their mother and their breeder, arose to the strength that is more than all their strengths.

THE END.





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